

**A BOOK OF  
IMPERFECT SAINTS**

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## The Saints, following the Roman Calendar

The dates assigned to saints in this book are those on which they are remembered and honoured in the Roman liturgical calendar; it is usually the (reputed) date of their death.

2 <b>January:</b>	Saints Basil and Gregory.
7 January:	Saint Raymond of Peñafort.
13 January:	Saint Hilary of Poitiers.
17 January:	Saint Anthony of Egypt.
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20 January:	Pope Saint Fabian.
20 January:	Saint Sebastian.
21 January:	Saint Agnes.
22 January:	Saint Vincent.
24 January:	Saint Francis de Sales.
25 January:	Conversion of Saint Paul.
26 January:	Saints Timothy and Titus.
27 January:	Saint Angela Merici.
28 January:	Saint Thomas Aquinas.
31 January:	Saint John Bosco.

1 <b>February:</b>	Saint Brigid.
3 February:	Saint Blaise.
3 February:	Saint Ansgar.
5 February:	Saint Agatha.
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6 February:	Saint Paul Miki and companions, Martyrs of Japan.
8 February:	Saint Jerome Emiliani.

8 February:	Saint Josephine Bakhita.
10 February:	Saint Scholastica.
14 February:	Saints Cyril and Methodius.
17 February:	Seven Founders of the Servites.
21 February:	Saint Peter Damian.
23 February:	Saint Polycarp.
<b>4 March:</b>	Saint Casimir.
7 March:	Saints Perpetua and Felicity.
8 March:	Saint John of God.
9 March:	Saint Frances of Rome.
17 March:	Saint Patrick.
18 March:	Saint Cyril of Jerusalem.
19 March:	Saint Joseph.
23 March:	Saint Turibius of Mongrovejo.
<b>2 April:</b>	Saint Francis of Paola.
4 April:	Saint Isidore of Seville.
5 April:	Saint Vincent Ferrer.
7 April:	Saint Jean Baptiste de la Salle.
11 April:	Saint Stanislaus.
13 April:	Pope Saint Martin I.
16 April:	Saint Bernadette Soubirous.
21 April:	Saint Anselm.
23 April:	Saint George.
23 April:	Saint Adalbert.
24 April:	Saint Fidelis of Sigmaringen.
25 April:	Saint Mark the Evangelist.
28 April:	Saint Peter Chanel
28 April:	Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort.
29 April:	Saint Catherine of Siena.

30 April:	Pope Saint Pius V.
1 <b>May</b> :	Saint Joseph the Worker.
2 May:	Saint Athanasius.
3 May:	Saints Philip and James.
5 May:	Blessed Edmund Rice.
12 May:	Saints Nereus and Achilleus.
12 May:	Saint Pancras.
14 May:	Saint Matthias, apostle.
17 May:	Saint Paschal Baylon.
18 May:	Pope Saint John I.
20 May:	Saint Bernardine of Siena.
21 May:	Saint Cristóbal Magallanes and Companions.
22 May:	Saint Rita of Cascia.
25 May:	Saint Bede the Venerable.
25 May:	Pope Saint Gregory VII.
25 May:	Saint Mary Magdalen de Pazzi.
26 May:	Saint Philip Neri.
27 May:	Saint Augustine of Canterbury.
1 <b>June</b> :	Saint Justin.
2 June:	Saints Marcellinus and Peter.
3 June:	Saints Charles Lwanga and companions, Martyrs of Uganda.
5 June:	Saint Boniface.
6 June:	Saint Norbert.
9 June:	Saint Ephraem of Syria.
11 June:	Saint Barnabas.
13 June:	Saint Anthony.
19 June:	Saint Romuald.
21 June:	Saint Aloysius Gonzaga.

22 June:	Saint Paulinus of Nola.
22 June:	Saints John Fisher and Thomas More.
24 June:	Birth of John the Baptist.
27 June:	Saint Cyril of Alexandria.
28 June:	Saint Irenaeus.
29 June:	Saints Peter and Paul, apostles.
30 June:	The early Martyrs of Rome.
<b>3 July:</b>	Saint Thomas, apostle.
4 July:	Saint Elizabeth of Portugal.
5 July:	Saint Anthony Mary Zaccaria.
6 July:	Saint Maria Goretti.
9 July:	The Martyrs of China.
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11 July:	Saint Benedict.
13 July:	Saint Henry II.
14 July:	Saint Camillus de Lellis.
14 July:	Saint Francis Solano.
14 July:	Saint Kateri Tekakwitha.
15 July:	Saint Bonaventure.
16 July:	Our Lady of Mount Carmel.
20 July:	Saint Apollinaris.
21 July:	Saint Lawrence of Brindisi.
22 July:	Saint Mary Magdalene.
23 July:	Saint Bridget of Sweden.
24 July:	Saint Sharbel Makhlof.
25 July:	Saint James, apostle.
26 July:	Saints Joachim and Anne.
29 July:	Saint Martha.
30 July:	Saint Peter Chrysologus.
31 July:	Saint Ignatius Loyola.



<b>1 August:</b>	Saint Alphonsus Liguori.
2 August:	Saint Eusebius of Vercelli.
2 August:	Saint Peter Julian Eymard.
4 August:	Saint John Vianney.
7 August:	Pope Saint Sixtus II.
7 August:	Saint Cajetan.
8 August:	Saint Dominic.
8 August:	Saint Mary Helen McKillop.
9 August:	Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.
10 August:	Saint Lawrence.
11 August:	Saint Clare of Assisi.
12 August:	Saint Jane Frances Fremiot de Chantal.
13 August:	Saints Pontianus and Hippolytus.
14 August:	Saint Maximilian Kolbe.
16 August:	Saint Stephen of Hungary.
19 August:	Saint John Eudes.
20 August:	Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.
21 August:	Pope Saint Pius X.
23 August:	Saint Rose of Lima.
24 August:	Saint Bartholomew.
25 August:	Saint Louis IX.
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25 August:	Saint Joseph Calasanz.
27 August:	Saint Monica.
28 August:	Saint Augustine.
29 August:	Passion of Saint John the Baptist.
<b>3 September:</b>	Pope Saint Gregory I, the Great.
13 September:	Saint John Chrysostom.

A Note on Misogynism among Christians.

- 16 September: Saints Cornelius and Cyprian.  
17 September: Saint Robert Bellarmine.  
18 September: Saint Joseph of Cupertino.  
19 September: Saint Januarius.  
20 September: The Martyrs of Korea.  
21 September: Saint Matthew the Evangelist.  
23 September: Saint Pio of Pietrelcina.  
26 September: Saints Cosmas and Damian.  
27 September: Saint Vincent de Paul.  
28 September: Saint Wenceslaus.  
28 September: Saint Lorenzo Ruiz.  
29 September: Archangels, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.  
30 September: Saint Jerome.

- 1 **October**: Saint Thérèse of Lisieux.  
2 October: Guardian Angels.  
4 October: Saint Francis of Assisi.  
6 October: Saint Bruno.  
9 October: Saint Denis.

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- 9 October: Saint John Leonardi.  
9 October: Blessed John Henry Newman.  
14 October: Pope Saint Callistus I.  
15 October: Saint Teresa of Ávila.  
16 October: Saint Hedwig.  
16 October: Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque.  
17 October: Saint Ignatius of Antioch.  
18 October: Saint Luke the Evangelist.  
19 October: Saints John de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues and Companions.

19 October:	Saint Paul of the Cross.
19 October:	Saint Peter of Alcántara.
23 October:	Saint John of Capestrano.
24 October:	Saint Anthony Mary Claret.
28 October:	Saints Simon and Jude, apostles.
<b>3 November:</b>	Saint Martin de Porres.
4 November:	Saint Charles Borromeo.
6 November:	All the Saints of Ireland.
10 November:	Pope Saint Leo the Great.
11 November:	Saint Martin of Tours.
12 November:	Saint Josaphat.
15 November:	Saint Albert the Great.
16 November:	Saint Margaret of Scotland.
16 November:	Saint Gertrude.
17 November:	Saint Elizabeth of Hungary.
22 November:	Saint Cecilia.
23 November:	Saint Columban.
23 November:	Saint Clement of Rome.
24 November:	The Martyrs of Viet-Nam: Saint Andrew Dung-Lac and his companions.
25 November:	Saint Catherine of Alexandria.
30 November:	Saint Andrew, apostle.
<b>3 December:</b>	Saint Francis Xavier.
4 December:	Saint John of Damascus
6 December:	Saint Nicholas.
7 December:	Saint Ambrose.
9 December:	Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin.
11 December:	Pope Saint Damasus I.
13 December:	Saint Lucy.

14 December:	Saint John of the Cross.
21 December:	Saint Peter Canisius.
23 December:	Saint John of Kanty.
26 December:	Saint Stephen.
27 December:	Saint John the Evangelist.
28 December:	The Holy Innocents.
29 December:	Saint Thomas Becket.
31 December:	Pope Saint Sylvester I.

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Afterword

## What is a Saint?

‘When people write the lives of the saints, they usually write one long lie. They should write everything about them: their repugnance, their difficulties, the struggles they had to keep themselves holy, even their falls and faults. Instead, far too often they write only about their virtues, as though they were faultless and free from the effects of original sin.’ (1) Saint Teresa of Ávila thought likewise, ‘When they say someone is a saint, you can be sure they are talking nonsense!’ (2) Think, too, of the French saying about a liar, ‘He lies like a second nocturn.’ The second nocturn was part of the Office of Readings (or Matins), in which the life of a saint was usually included.

‘Saints are... conduits to holiness, who can be read at different times by different people... They are not flawless paragons of lifeless virtue; they are the stuff of story-telling because they lived passionately the muck and mire of human existence.’ (3) Like every other human being, they are bundles of contradictions. That is not a problem: Saint Thomas Aquinas said that only the devil is truly consistent, and Gandhi replied to a critic, saying, ‘Don’t expect me to be consistent, but do insist that I be honest.’ And he also said, ‘Truth is my God.’

One thing we rarely hear of in the lives of the saints, or of Jesus, is humour. It is as if we thought it belittled or trivialized them. And yet I recall a Jewish acquaintance saying he could recognize Jesus as Jewish because of his

humour. The saints - some of them anyway - smiled and laughed. One day, Saint Pio of Pietrelcina said to his confrères in community, 'Three things are utterly pointless: washing the face of a donkey, pouring water into the sea – and preaching to priests and religious!'

We want the saints to be perfect. But they weren't; they were human, and that means being limited, and also sometimes sinful. The saints were not canonized because they were perfect – 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3.23) – but because they offer hope to us who are even more imperfect than they. They are larger-than-life people: large in their achievements, large in their (sometimes unfulfilled) ambitions - and large, too, in their mistakes. Does anyone imagine Saint Paul would have been an easy person to work with, a "nice" person to live with?

The lives of the saints suffer a low level of credibility, and often with good reason. At times, the word *hagiography* is used as a synonym for propaganda – e.g., the hagiography of Kim Il Sung of North Korea. Biographies of the saints sometimes present them as painted dolls rather than human beings with their share of sin, stupidity, selfishness and weakness - like the rest of the family. They had their sinfulness alongside their saintliness: -

- Paul and Barnabas, apostles, quarrelled violently and could no longer work with each other (Acts 15.39);

- Bernardine of Siena was anti-Semitic and homophobic;
- Bernard of Clairvaux was arrogant, and cruel in his humour;
- Teresa of Calcutta and Thérèse of Lisieux were depressed and suicidal;
- Margaret of Cortona rejected her son born out of wedlock, as if he were to blame for having been born;
- Francis de Sales was hot-tempered;
- Benedict Joseph Labre was riddled with lice because he rarely washed;
- John Bosco was widely regarded as a wheeler-dealer;
- Cyril of Alexandria used violence and political skulduggery;
- John Mary Vianney was mentally ill;
- Joseph Calasanz covered up paedophilia; Catherine of Siena and Rose of Lima were odd, to put it mildly;
- Athanasius of Alexandria used devious politics to advance his career;
- Marco d'Aviano preached racial hatred;
- Thomas More and Robert Bellarmine had heretics burned at the stake;
- Pio of Pietrelcina was sometimes harsh with penitents;
- Ignatius Loyola made a monumentally foolish statement;
- Vincent Ferrer, among other saints, treated Jews badly;

- many male saints were misogynistic and a list of their statements about women makes for embarrassing reading.

Among the saints were bullies, megalomaniacs and autocrats; anti-Semites and homophobes; racists and misogynists; war-mongers and cowards; the devious and the dotty; hysterics and wheeler-dealers. Few were “normal,” if that means being predictable, or conforming to prevailing expectations. In other words, they were human beings, like the rest of us.

A saint isn't someone who never does anything wrong, though we like to think of them as morally perfect. Nor is a saint someone who can work miracles at the drop of a hat to get through the difficulties of life. Saints are ordinary men and women who try to be faithful to God, who forgive, who pray, who look beyond the self to the other and to the Other. A saint is a sinner who never stops trying, someone who falls and gets up, falls and gets up, falls and gets up. Pope Benedict XVI said,

Holiness does not consist in never having erred or sinned. Holiness increases the capacity for conversion, for repentance, for a willingness to start again and, especially, for reconciliation and forgiveness.... It is not the fact that we have never erred but our capacity for reconciliation and forgiveness which makes us saints. (General Audience, 31 January 2007)



‘The church is not so much a school of perfection as a hospital for incurables.’ (Eamon Duffy, *Faith of our Fathers*, Continuum, London, 2004, p.156, or, in Pope Francis’ phrase, “a field hospital.”)

## **References**

1. Saint Leopold of Herceg Novi, cited by Pietro da Valdiporto, *Father Leopoldo*, Padua, Italy, 1963, p.186.
2. Eugene McCaffrey OCD, *Let Nothing trouble You: Teresa, the woman, the guide and the storyteller*, The Columba Press, Dublin, 2015.
3. Michael Higgins, ‘A saint in the making,’ *The Irish Catholic*, 9 February 2012, p.21.

## A Note on Canonization and Beatification

Canonization means that a person's name has been added to the canon (Greek: *list*) of the saints, while beatification means that a person is declared blessed (Latin: *Beatus*) by the church, that is to say, that they enjoy the beatific vision, the vision of God in heaven. In that sense, the blessed are saints no less than those who are formally called such.

Catholics honour the saints because of the gifts of God they see at work in them. And they pray to them, seeing them as members of the one family of faith, the communion of saints. As Paul asked Christians to pray for him – see Romans 15.30, 2 Corinthians 1.11, Ephesians 6.18-19 and Colossians 4.3 – so we ask the saints to pray for us. They have reached the goal that the rest of us on earth still strive for.

In the early centuries of the church, there was no formal process of canonization. Applied almost entirely to martyrs, canonization developed informally in local churches. The bishop, if he established that a person was truly a martyr for Christ, might send an account to neighbouring churches. If these agreed, those whose reputation was thus confirmed were known as *vindicated* martyrs.

The veneration of confessors – that is, of those who confessed the faith and died peacefully after a life of heroic virtue - is not as long-standing as that of martyrs.

A person acquired a reputation for holiness, for an exemplary Christian life, as one who lived by faith, hope and charity.

It seems that the informal process fell victim to popular indiscretion and failure by some bishops to exercise good judgment in the matter. So it came to be placed in the hands of regional or general councils of the church.

In recent centuries, especially from the times of Popes Urban VIII (1623-1644) and Benedict XIV (1740-1758), the process has become more formal. It involves, among other things, an examination of the person's life, writings and speeches, to see if they are in accord with Christian tradition; this is a *sine qua non*. The process also looks at whether there is a local cult. It looks, too, to see whether alleged miracles, such as cures, said to have been wrought through the person's intercession, are adequately attested, or are explicable by natural causes. In the case of martyrs, the requirement of a miracle is dispensed with. This is also done, exceptionally, in other cases. (Kateri Tekakwitha is an example of this.) If the cult of the holy person is prescribed for the universal church, the person is recognized as a saint, while, if it is simply permitted, or is merely local, then it is called beatification.

Beatification and canonization require papal authorization, even if, occasionally, the formal announcement is delegated to someone else. Because canonization involves a declaration that a given individual now lives with God, it is seen by the church as

involving the exercise of infallibility. Beatification is not seen in the same light because it is seen as a permission, not a precept. Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote,

Since the honour we pay the saints is in a certain sense a profession of faith, i.e., a belief in the glory of the saints, we must piously believe that in this matter also the judgment of the church is not liable to error.' (*Quodlib.* IX, a. 16)

Canonization is understood as meaning that the person is "in" heaven. The wording of decrees of canonization supports this: 'In honour of Almighty God, we decree and define that Blessed N. is a saint, and we inscribe his (her) name in the catalogue of the saints.'

Margaret Visser wrote,

Sainthood is perhaps the only honour accorded a person without consideration of physical beauty or prowess, wealth, birth, political power, intelligence, fame, or talent; a saint is admired, and considered exemplary, entirely for being good. (*The Geometry of Love: Space, Time, Mystery and Meaning in an Ordinary Church*, HarperFlamingo, Toronto, 2000, p.88; cited by Arthur Paul Boers, *The Way is made by Walking: A Pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago*, IVP Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2007, p.31.)

What sainthood does require is heroic virtue.

## **SAINTS BASIL AND GREGORY: 2 January**

Basil was born into a wealthy family in the town of Caesarea in Cappadocia (modern Turkey) about 331. His maternal grandfather was a martyr, executed in the years prior to Constantine I's conversion. A sister and three brothers are venerated as saints: Macrina the Younger, Naucratius, Peter of Sebaste and Gregory of Nyssa.

Following the death of his father in his teens, Basil began formal education. He met Gregory of Nazianzus who would become a lifelong friend. They studied in Constantinople; then, starting around 349, they spent six years in Athens where they met a fellow student, later to become the Emperor Julian, the Apostate.

Basil left Athens in 356. After travelling in Egypt and Syria, he returned to Caesarea, where, for around a year, he practiced law and taught rhetoric. A year later, his life changed radically after he met Eustace of Sebaste, a charismatic bishop and ascetic. Basil abandoned his legal and teaching professions in order to devote his life to God. Describing his spiritual awakening, he wrote,

‘I wasted much time on follies, and spent nearly all of my youth in vain labours, and devotion to the teachings of a wisdom that God had made foolish. Suddenly, I awoke as out of a deep sleep. I beheld the wonderful light of the Gospel truth, and I recognized the nothingness of the wisdom of the princes of this world.’

Basil sought and received baptism, then travelled in 357 to Palestine, Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia to study monastic life. While impressed by the piety of the ascetics, solitary life held little appeal for him. He turned his attention to communal religious life. After dividing his money among the poor he went into solitude for a short time. But he soon ventured out, and, by 358, he had gathered round him a group of like-minded disciples, including his brother Peter. Together they founded a monastic settlement, probably the first in Asia Minor, on his family estate. Joining him there were his mother, by then a widow, his sister Macrina and several other women, who gave themselves to prayer and charitable works.

Basil then began writing on communal monastic life works which are regarded as pivotal in the development of the monastic tradition of the Eastern Church and led to his being called the father of Eastern communal monasticism. About 358, he and his friend, Gregory of Nazianzus, began work on the *Philocalia*, an anthology drawn from Origen.

Basil attended the Council of Constantinople in 360. There he first sided with the Homoiousians, who taught that the Son was of like substance with the Father, neither the same (one substance) nor different. The Homoousians professed that the members of the Trinity were of one substance (*homoousios*). But some years later he came to support the Nicene Creed (Homoousian).

In 365, Basil was ordained priest, probably in response to a request from his local bishop. Together with Gregory Nazianzus, Basil spent the next few years combating the Arian heresy, which denied the divinity of Christ and threatened to divide the church. They participated in a great rhetorical contest precipitated by the arrival of the best Arian theologians. In the subsequent debates, Gregory and Basil emerged triumphant.

This success confirmed for Basil and Gregory that their future lay in the pastoral care of the church. Basil was given the administration of the diocese of Caesarea, and, in 370, became its bishop. He encouraged his clergy not to be tempted by wealth, and took care in selecting suitable candidates for holy orders. He criticized public officials who failed in the administration of justice. He worked to reform thieves and he challenged prostitution. He preached every morning and evening to large congregations. He gave his family inheritance to the poor, and built a large relief centre, a hospice and a hospital, regarded as one of the wonders of the world.

His zeal for orthodoxy did not blind him to what was good in an opponent. For the sake of peace and charity he was content to waive the use of orthodox terminology when it could be surrendered without sacrificing the truth. But when Emperor Valens, an Arian, sent his prefect to persuade Basil to agree to a compromise, Basil's negative response was adamant. The prefect reported back to Valens that he believed nothing short of violence would prevail against Basil. Valens was

apparently unwilling to engage in violence, but he repeatedly issued orders banishing Basil, none of which succeeded. But when Valens attended the Divine Liturgy on the feast of the Epiphany celebrated by Basil, he was so impressed that he donated to him the land on which the relief centre was built. This interaction helped create a new relationship between empire and church, limiting the empire's control over it.

Basil's principal theological writings are his *On the Holy Spirit*, an appeal to Scripture and tradition to establish the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and several works against Arianism. (Arianism – not to be confused with the Aryanism of Nazi ideology – is associated with Arius, a fourth-century priest in Alexandria, Egypt; it involved a denial of the divinity of Christ.) He was a famous preacher, and many of his homilies, including a series of Lenten lectures on the *Hexaëmeron*, the *Six Days of Creation*, and an exposition of the Psalms, have been preserved. Some, like that against usury, and on the famine in 368, are valuable for the history of morals; others illustrate the honour paid to martyrs and relics.

In his exegesis, Basil believed in the need for a spiritual interpretation of Scripture, as his co-editorship of the *Philokalia* with Gregory of Nazianzen testifies. He wrote, 'To take the literal sense and stop there, is to have the heart covered by the veil of literalism. Lamps are useless when the sun is shining.' At the same time he opposed the wild allegories of some writers. He wrote, 'I know the laws of allegory, though less by myself than from the works of others. There are those, truly, who do



not admit the common sense of the Scriptures, for whom water is not water, but some other nature, who see in a plant, in a fish, what their fancy wishes, who change the nature of reptiles and of wild beasts to suit their allegories, like the interpreters of dreams who explain visions in sleep to make them serve their own end.’

His ascetic teaching is expressed in the *Moralia* and *Asketika*, ethical manuals for use in the world and the cloister, respectively. It is in these and in his sermons that the practical aspects of his theology are set out: for example, he explains that it is our common human nature which obliges us to treat our neighbour’s needs as our own. His three hundred letters reveal a rich and observant nature, optimistic, tender, and even playful. His efforts as a reformer were directed principally towards the improvement of monastic institutions and of the liturgy. A vast body of prayers attributed to him has survived in the Eastern Christian churches.

Through his example and teaching, Basil effected a noteworthy moderation in the austere practices previously characteristic of monastic life. He is also credited with ensuring balance between manual work, liturgical prayer and community life. Together with Pachomius, Basil is remembered as one of the foremost influences in the development of Christian monasticism. Not only is he recognized as the father of Eastern monasticism, but his legacy extends also to the West, largely due to his influence on Saint Benedict. As a result of this, numerous religious orders in Eastern

Christianity bear his name. In the Catholic Church, there is also a religious congregation named after him.

When Saint Athanasius of Alexandria died, the mantle of defender of the faith against Arianism fell on Basil. He worked hard to unite his fellow Catholics who were crushed by tyranny and torn by internal dissension. He wrote to Pope Damasus for support, but his appeals brought no response. Much to Basil's disappointment, Damasus appeared indifferent. Basil said, 'For my sins I seem to be unsuccessful in everything.' In his lifetime, he was misunderstood, misrepresented, and accused of heresy and ambition. While hot-blooded and imperious, he was also generous and sympathetic. He did not live to see the success of his efforts on behalf of the church. Liver illness and excessive asceticism brought on an early death. He died aged forty-eight, on 1 January 379.

He was given the title of doctor of the church for his part in the debates on Arianism. His greatest contribution was his insistence on the divinity and consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. Along with John Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzus, he is numbered by the Orthodox among the three holy hierarchs. Seventy-two years after his death, the Council of Chalcedon described him as 'the great Basil, minister of grace who has expounded the truth to the whole earth.'

On the Eucharist, Basil wrote, 'Daily communion and participation in the holy body and blood of Christ is a good and helpful practice. Jesus clearly says, "The one

who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life.” Who doubts that to partake of life continually is really to have life in abundance? For myself, I communicate four times a week, on the Lord's Day, on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, and on the other days if there is a commemoration of a martyr.’ (*Letter 93*)

He also said, ‘What is the mark of a Christian? To love one another, even as Christ loved us. What is the mark of a Christian? To see the Lord always before us. What is the mark of a Christian? To watch each night and day and in perfectly pleasing God to be ready, knowing that the Lord will come at an hour we do not expect.’

In his *Moralia*, Basil wrote that the pastor should strive to be, ‘an apostle and minister of Christ, steward of God’s mysteries, a herald of the Kingdom, a model and rule of piety, an eye of the Body of the Church, a pastor of Christ’s sheep, a loving doctor, father and nurse, a co-operator of God, a farmer of God, a builder of God’s temple.’ (*Moralia* 80, 11-20; PG 31, 864b-868b)

Here is a selection of prayers he left us: -  
‘Lord God, enlarge within us a sense of solidarity with all living things, with our brothers the animals to whom you gave the earth as their home in common with us. We remember with shame that we have often exercised dominion over them with ruthless cruelty so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to you in song, has instead been a groan of suffering. May we realize that they live not for us alone but for themselves

and for you, and that they also love the sweetness of life.’

‘Lord our God, teach us to ask you for those blessings of which we are most in need. Steer the ship of our life towards yourself, you who are the tranquil haven of all storm-tossed souls. Show us the course we should follow. Let your Spirit curb our wilfulness and guide and enable us in what is good, to keep your laws, and in all our works for ever to rejoice in your glorious and gladdening presence. For yours is the glory and praise from all your saints, for ever and ever. Amen.’

‘Rising from sleep I thank you, Holy Trinity, that for the sake of your great kindness and patience you have not been angry with me even though I am lazy and sinful. Neither have you punished me for my sins but you have shown your customary love towards me and have raised me up as I lay in heedlessness so that I might say my morning prayer and glorify your greatness. Do you now enlighten the eyes of my understanding, open my ears to receive your word and teach me your commandments. Help me to do your will, to praise you, to confess you from my heart and to praise your all-holy Name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and for ever, to the ages of ages. Amen.’

‘Christ, Master and God, King of the ages, Maker of all things, I thank you for the gifts you have given me, and especially for the gift of sharing in your pure and life-giving mysteries. Therefore, I ask you, gracious Lord who loves all people, to preserve me under your

protection and beneath the shadow of your wings. Grant me to the very end of my life to share worthily and with a clean conscience in your holy things, for the remission of sins and unto eternal life. For you are the bread of life, the fountain of all holiness, the giver of all good; and to you we give glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever, to the ages of ages. Amen.'

He also wrote on prayer: -

'I think it useful to have diversity and variety in the prayers and psalms at the regular hours, because, where there is monotony, the soul tends to become weary and distracted: but when there is change and variety in the psalmody and in the pattern of each hour, then the desire of the soul is renewed and concentration is restored.'  
(*Extended Monastic Rule*, n.37)

**Gregory** was born near Nazianzus, in Cappadocia, modern Turkey, about 329, to a wealthy family. His mother, Nonna, was a Christian; his father, Gregory, was not. When Gregory was about six, his father became a Christian through his mother's influence and later became bishop of Nazianzus.

Young Gregory studied at home, and in Alexandria and Athens. On the way to Athens his ship encountered a violent storm, and the terrified Gregory prayed to Christ that if he would deliver him, he would dedicate his life to his service. He had exceptional ability, and became a teacher while still young.

In 361, Gregory returned to Nazianzus and was ordained priest by his father, who wanted him to serve the local church. The younger Gregory, who had been considering a monastic existence, resented his father's decision to force him to choose between pastoral ministry and a solitary existence, calling it an "act of tyranny." Leaving home after a few days, he met his friend Basil, who urged him to return home to assist his father, which he did for a year. Arriving at Nazianzus, Gregory found the local Christian community split by theological differences and his father accused of heresy by local monks. Gregory helped to heal the division through a combination of personal diplomacy and oratory.

By this time, the Emperor Julian the Apostate had publicly declared himself in opposition to Christianity. In response to the emperor's rejection of the faith,

Gregory composed his *Invectives against Julian*. In this he said that Christianity would overcome imperfect rulers such as Julian through love and patience. Julian resolved, in 362, to prosecute Gregory and his other Christian critics, but died the following year in a war against the Persians. With his death, Gregory and the Eastern churches were no longer under threat, since the new emperor, Jovian, was a Christian.

Gregory spent the next few years combating Arianism, which threatened to divide Cappadocia. He and his friend, Basil, worked together on this common project. In 372, Basil ordained Gregory bishop of Sasima, a see he had created especially to advance his own control over that area. The ambition of Gregory's father to have his son rise in the hierarchy, and Basil's insistence, persuaded Gregory to accept this position despite his reservations. Gregory would later refer to his episcopal ordination as forced upon him by his strong-willed father and Basil. He was not enthused by his new posting, describing it as an 'utterly dreadful, pokey little hole; a paltry horse-stop on the main road... devoid of water, vegetation, or the company of gentlemen... this was my church of Sasima!' He made little effort to administer his new diocese, complaining to Basil that he preferred instead to pursue a contemplative life.

By late 372, Gregory returned to Nazianzus to assist his dying father in the administration of his diocese. This strained his relationship with Basil, who demanded that Gregory resume his post at Sasima. Gregory retorted that he had no intention of playing the role of pawn to

advance Basil's ambition. Instead he focused his attention on his new duties as coadjutor of Nazianzus. It was there that he preached the first of his great orations.

Following the deaths of both his parents in 374, Gregory continued to administer the diocese of Nazianzus, but refused to be named its bishop. Donating most of his inheritance to the needy, he lived an austere existence. At the end of 375, he withdrew to a monastery, living there for three years. Near the end of this period his friend Basil died. Although Gregory's health did not permit him to attend the funeral, he wrote a heartfelt letter of condolence to Basil's brother, Gregory of Nyssa, and composed twelve memorial poems dedicated to the memory of his departed friend.

Emperor Valens died in 378. The accession of Theodosius I, a steadfast supporter of Nicene orthodoxy, was good news to those who wished to purge Constantinople of Arianism. The exiled Nicene party gradually returned to the city. From his deathbed, Basil urged his friend to champion the Trinitarian cause in Constantinople.

In 379, the Antioch synod asked Gregory to go to Constantinople to lead a theological campaign to win over that city to Nicene orthodoxy. Retiring and sensitive, he dreaded being drawn into a whirlpool of corruption and violence. But, after much hesitation, he agreed. He delivered five powerful discourses on Nicene doctrine, explaining the nature of the Trinity and the



unity of the Godhead, including the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

Gregory's homilies attracted ever-growing crowds. In one, he said,

Was it not God whose first request to us is that we should show generosity in return? Having already received so much from him and hoping for so much more, we should surely be ashamed to refuse God the one thing he asks of us, which is to show generosity to others. (Prayer 14, On Love of the Poor 23-25; PG 35.887-890)

Fearing his popularity, his opponents decided to strike. On the vigil of Easter in 379, an Arian mob burst into the church during worship, wounding Gregory and killing another bishop. Escaping the mob, Gregory found himself betrayed by a former friend, who wished to have himself ordained bishop of Constantinople. Shocked, Gregory decided to resign his office, but those loyal to him induced him to stay and they ejected his opponent. However, the episode left him exposed to criticism as a provincial simpleton unable to cope with intrigues of the imperial city. He later wrote, 'If I must write the truth, my intention is to keep clear of every conference of bishops, for I never saw any good come of them, nor a remedy for evil but rather an increase. For there is strife and ambition, and these have the upper hand of reason.'

Affairs in Constantinople remained confused as Gregory's position was still unofficial and Arian priests

occupied many important churches. The arrival of the emperor Theodosius in 380 settled matters in his favour. The emperor, determined to eliminate Arianism, expelled the Arian bishop and subsequently put Gregory in place as bishop of Constantinople.

Theodosius wanted to further unite the empire behind the orthodox position and decided to convene a church council to resolve matters of faith and discipline. Gregory was of similar mind, wishing to unify Christianity. In 381, they convened the second Council of Constantinople, attended by 150 Eastern bishops. After the death of the presiding bishop, Gregory was selected to lead it, but Egyptian and Macedonian bishops refused to recognise his position in Constantinople, arguing that his transfer from Sasima was uncanonical.

Gregory was physically exhausted and worried that he was losing the confidence of the bishops and the emperor. Rather than press his case and risk further division, he decided to resign his office, saying 'Let me be as the Prophet Jonah! I was responsible for the storm, but I would sacrifice myself for the salvation of the ship. Seize me and throw me... I was not happy when I ascended the throne, and gladly would I descend it.' He shocked the council by his surprise resignation and then delivered a dramatic speech to Theodosius, asking to be released from office. The emperor, moved by his words, applauded, commended him and accepted his resignation. The council asked him to appear once more for a farewell celebratory address. Gregory used this

occasion to deliver a final oration (No. 42), and then departed.

Returning to Cappadocia, Gregory once again resumed his position as bishop of Nazianzus. He spent the next year combating local heresies and struggling with illness. He also began composing *De Vita Sua*, his autobiographical poem. By the end of 383, he had become too feeble to cope with his duties. He chose a successor and then withdrew into solitude. After enjoying five peaceful years in retirement at his family estate, he died on 25 January 389. He had said, 'The whole of human life is but a single day to those who labour in love.'

Throughout his life Gregory faced difficult choices. Should he pursue studies as a speaker or philosopher? Would monastic life be more appropriate than public ministry? Was it better to create his own path or follow that mapped out for him by his father and Basil? Gregory's writings illuminate the conflicts which both tormented and motivated him. Biographers suggest that it was this dialectic which defined him, shaped his character and inspired his search for meaning and truth.

Gregory's most significant theological contributions arose from his defence of the doctrine of the Trinity. He wrote,

The Old Testament proclaimed the Father clearly, but the Son more obscurely. The New Testament revealed the Son, and gave us a glimpse of the

divinity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells among us and grants us a clearer vision of himself. (*Oratio Theologica*, 5.26, PG 36.161-163)

He is especially noted for his study of the Holy Spirit. In this regard, Gregory was the first to use the idea of *procession* to describe the relationship between the Spirit and the Godhead, 'The Holy Spirit is truly Spirit, coming forth from the Father indeed but not after the manner of the Son, for it is not by generation but by *procession*, since I must coin a word for the sake of clarity.' Although Gregory did not fully develop the concept, the idea of procession would shape much later thought on the Holy Spirit.

Gregory emphasized that Jesus did not cease to be God when he became a man, nor did he lose any of his divine attributes when he took on human nature. Furthermore, he asserted that Christ was fully human, including a full human soul. He also proclaimed the eternality of the Holy Spirit, saying that the Holy Spirit's actions were somewhat hidden in the Old Testament, but clearer since the ascension of Jesus and the descent at Pentecost.

Gregory maintained the Nicæan doctrine of consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. He asserted that God's nature is unknowable to man; helped to develop the framework of *hypostases*, or three persons united in a single Godhead; illustrated how Jesus is the *image* of the Father; and explained the belief that all Christians can be assimilated with God 'in imitation of the incarnate Son as the divine model.' Some of

Gregory's theological writings suggest that he may have supported the belief that God will bring all of creation into harmony with the Kingdom of Heaven.

Apart from theological discourses, Gregory was also one of the most important early Christian men of letters, an accomplished orator, perhaps one of the greatest of his time, and also a prolific poet, writing several poems with theological and moral matter and some with biographical content, about himself and his friends. He said, 'Christ is born; glorify him. Christ comes from heaven; go out to meet him. Christ descends to earth; let us be raised on high.' And, 'Anyone who does not admit that holy Mary is the Mother of God is out of touch with the godhead.' (*Letter* 101.6)

Gregory's great-nephew served as his literary executor, preserving and editing many of his writings. A cousin published several of Gregory's more noteworthy works in 391. By 400, his *Orations* had been translated into Latin. As his works circulated throughout the empire they influenced theological thought. His *Orations* were cited as authoritative by the first Council of Ephesus in 431. By 451 he was designated *Theologos*, or *Theologian* by the Council of Chalcedon – a title held by no others except John the Apostle and Symeon the New Theologian. He is widely quoted by Eastern Orthodox theologians, and highly regarded as a defender of the Christian faith. His contributions to Trinitarian theology are also influential and often cited in the Western churches. Along with the brothers Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, he is known as one of the

Cappadocian Fathers. In the East, he is revered, along with Basil the Great and John Chrysostom, as one of the three Holy Hierarchs, and has the title of 'The Theologian.' The Protestant theologian Paul Tillich credits him with having 'created the definitive formulae for the doctrine of the Trinity.' Additionally, the *Liturgy of Saint Gregory the Theologian* used by the Coptic Church is named after him.

## **SAINT RAYMOND OF PEÑAFORT: 7 January**

Raymond of Peñafort was born near Barcelona, Spain, around 1175. He was educated there and in Bologna, where he received doctorates in civil and canon law. In 1210, he moved to Bologna, where he remained until 1222, including three years in the chair of canon law. He was also chaplain to Pope Alexander IV.

Returning to Barcelona in 1222, Raymond entered the Order of Preachers, the newly-founded Dominicans. He was made Master of the Order in 1238, but resigned in 1240. During his tenure he revised the Dominican *Constitutions* that governed the friars' way of life up until their revision in 1924.

Pope Gregory IX summoned him to Rome in 1230 to be his confessor and to help codify canon law. These laws of the church, which had been scattered in many publications, were to be organized into one set of documents. Papal letters had changed the law over the course of the previous century since the publication of the *Decretum* of Gratian. The pope announced the new publication in a *Bull* addressed to the universities of Paris and Bologna in 1231, announcing that Raymond's work alone was authoritative, and should alone be used in schools. His collection of canon law, known as the *Decretals* of Gregory IX, became a standard text for almost seven hundred years. When Raymond had completed this, the pope offered to appoint him archbishop of Tarragona, but he declined. Raymond then

published his *Summa de Casibus Poenitentiae*, a text book on doctrinal and canonical questions for confessors which also came to be considered authoritative.

Raymond returned to Barcelona, with the aim of converting Jews and Muslims to Christianity. He caused both Hebrew and Arabic and to be taught in the higher schools of the Dominicans, and encouraged Thomas Aquinas to write his work, the *Summa contra Gentiles*.

He exercised great influence over King James of Aragon, and persuaded him to order a public debate between a rabbi from Girona and a baptized Jew of Montpellier, who was a Dominican. In this debate, which was held in the royal palace at Barcelona in 1263, in the presence of the king and many clergy, Raymond was the head of the theologians present. Speaking of Muslims and Jews, he said, 'They are not to be compelled, for compelled acts of service do not please God, who wants sincere ones.' On the Sabbath following the debate, the king, together with many priests, visited the synagogue. It is said that there Raymond delivered an address on the Trinity, which Jews deny. He was among those who established the Inquisition in Catalonia.

Life at court was not always to his liking. He wrote, 'Living as I do in the whirlwind of the court, I am hardly ever able to reach, or, to be quite honest, even to see from afar the tranquillity of contemplation.'

He died in Barcelona on 6 January 1275 at the age of about one hundred, and was buried in the cathedral. He



was canonized in 1601, and is the patron saint of lawyers, especially canon lawyers.

## **SAINT HILARY of POITIERS: 13 January**

Hilary was born to pagan parents in Poitiers, France, about the year 315. His name comes from the Latin word for *happy* or *cheerful*. He received a good education, including some knowledge of Greek. Later on he studied the Old and New Testaments, with the result that he abandoned his Neo-Platonism for Christianity, and, with his wife and daughter, was baptized into the faith.

So great was the respect in which Hilary was held by the citizens of Poitiers that, about 353, though still a married man, he was unanimously elected bishop. At that time Arianism was threatening to overrun the Western church. To repel this was the great task which Hilary undertook. One of his first steps was to secure the excommunication, by those of the French bishops who were still orthodox, of the Arian bishop of Arles and of some of his supporters.

About 355, he wrote to Emperor Constantius II protesting against the persecution by which the Arians had sought to crush their opponents. His efforts were not at first successful, for, at the synod of Béziers, summoned in 356 by the Emperor Constantius with the professed purpose of settling the longstanding dispute, Hilary was, by an imperial rescript, banished to Phrygia, in Asia Minor, where he spent nearly four years in exile.

From there, however, he continued to direct his diocese, and found time to write two of his most

important contributions to theology: his *On Synods*, also called *On the Faith of the Easterners*, a letter addressed in 358 to the semi-Arian bishops in Gaul, Germany and Britain, expounding the views (sometimes veiled in ambiguous words) of the Eastern bishops on the Nicene controversy; and – perhaps his greatest work - the *Twelve Books on the Trinity*, composed in 359-60, in which, for the first time, a successful attempt was made to express in Latin the theological subtleties elaborated in the original Greek. He wrote, ‘Jesus Christ has in himself the whole reality of manhood, and the whole reality of godhead,’ (*On the Trinity*, 10.19) and also, ‘Christ dwells in us; and when Christ thus dwells, God dwells. Where the Spirit of Christ dwells it is not another Spirit than the Spirit of God who dwells. But if Christ is understood to be in us through the Holy Spirit, we must recognize this as both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ.’ The first of these works was not entirely approved of by some members of his own party, who thought he had shown too much forbearance towards the Arians. He replied to their criticisms in another book, the *Reply to Critics of the Book on Synods*.

His requests for a public discussion with his opponents were so insistent that he was sent back to his diocese about 361, within a short time of the accession of Emperor Julian. He was occupied for two to three years in combating Arianism within his diocese, but in 364, extending his efforts beyond Gaul, he impeached as unorthodox Auxentius, the bishop of Milan, a man high in the imperial favour. Summoned to appear before Emperor Valentinian I at Milan to sustain his charges,

Hilary was embarrassed to hear the supposed heretic give orthodox answers to all the questions posed. Hilary's denunciation of him as a hypocrite did not save him from ignominious expulsion from Milan.

About 365, he published a book, *Against the Arians or Auxentius of Milan* in connection with the controversy; and another *Against Constantius Augustus*, in which he pronounced that lately deceased emperor as the Antichrist, a rebel against God, 'a tyrant whose sole object had been to make a gift to the devil of that world for which Christ had suffered.'

The later years of his life were spent in comparative quiet, devoted in part to preparing his *Exposition of the Psalms*, for which he was largely indebted to Origen, his *Commentary on Matthew's Gospel*, an allegorical exegesis, and his no longer extant translation of Origen's commentary on *Job*. Hilary is sometimes regarded as the first Latin Christian hymn writer, but none of the compositions assigned to him is indisputable.

He closely followed the two great Alexandrians, Origen and Athanasius, in exegesis and Christology respectively, but his work shows many traces of vigorous independent thought. Recent research has distinguished between his thought before and after his exile.

Towards the end of his episcopate, and, with his encouragement, Martin of Tours founded a monastery at Ligugé in his diocese. Hilary died about 368.

Among fourth-century Latin writers earlier than Ambrose, Hilary holds first place. Augustine of Hippo called him ‘the illustrious doctor of the churches,’ and his works continued to be highly influential in later centuries. In 1851, Pope Pius IX recognized him as a doctor of the church. He has been called ‘the hammer of the Arians’ and ‘the Athanasius of the West.’

The name *Hilary term* is given in many legal and educational institutions to the term, beginning on 7 January, that includes his feast.

On the Incarnation, Hilary wrote, ‘It was not necessary for him through whom man was made to become man, but it was necessary for us that God should be made flesh and dwell with us, that is to say, dwell within all flesh by assuming one fleshly body.’

This is one of his prayers: -

I beg you, Father, to preserve in me that pure and reverent faith and to grant that, to my last breath, I may testify to my conviction. May I always hold fast to what I publicly professed in the creed when I was baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. May I worship you, the Father of us all, and your Son together with you, and may I be counted worthy to receive your Holy Spirit who through your Son proceeds from you. For me there is sufficient evidence for this faith in the words: Father, all that I have is yours, and all that is yours is mine, spoken by Jesus Christ my Lord who remains, in, and from, and with you, the God who is

blessed for endless ages. Amen. (On the Trinity, 12.55-56; PL 10.471-472.)

## **SAINT ANTHONY of EGYPT: 17 January**

Anthony was born in Egypt in 251 to wealthy landowning parents. When he was about eighteen years old, his parents died, and left him with the care of an unmarried sister. In 285, at the age of thirty-four, he decided to follow the words of Jesus, who had said in the Gospel, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.' (Matthew 19.21) Anthony took these words literally. He gave some of the family estate to neighbours, sold the rest, donating the money to the poor, placed his sister with a group of Christian virgins in a kind of early convent and then himself became the disciple of a local hermit.

Anthony lived at a time when society was absorbed in the pursuit of power, position and possessions. The church, too, was affected by this: careerism, status-seeking and a desire to accommodate prevailing opinion led many believers to become disillusioned with it. The eremitical life was a protest against this and an attempt to offer an alternative to it. Anthony used to say, 'As long we are at peace with this world, we are at war with God and the angels and saints.' The monks were to an established church what the martyrs were to a persecuted church.

Many people came to visit Anthony and his companions, some to stay, others to be helped by spiritual counsel. Many centuries later, the Russian

Orthodox saint, Seraphim of Sarov, said, ‘Acquire inner peace and thousands around you will find salvation.’ It was something like that which motivated Anthony: he left society but it followed him.

Most of what is known about Anthony comes from the *Life of Anthony the Great*, written in Greek around 360 by Saint Athanasius of Alexandria. It depicts him as illiterate, simple, shrewd, humorous, affectionate, tender, and having great will-power. Sometime before 374, it was translated into Latin by Evagrius of Antioch. This helped it become one of the best known works of literature in the Christian world, a status it held through the Middle Ages. In addition to it, several surviving homilies and letters of varying authenticity provide additional biographical detail.

Anthony was prominent among the Desert Fathers. He is often considered the first monk, though, in fact, there were many others before him. He was, however, the first known ascetic going into the wilderness of Skete (about 270–271), and this seems to have contributed to his fame. Ascetics commonly retired to isolated locations on the outskirts of cities. Anthony followed this tradition and headed out into the Nitrian Desert, about 95 km from Alexandria, on the edge of the Western Desert. There he remained for some thirteen years. He allowed those who became his disciples great freedom, and not imposing anything on them. He used to say, ‘In following God, whatever you find in your heart to do, do it, and remain within yourself in him.’



According to Athanasius, the devil fought Saint Anthony by afflicting him with boredom, laziness, and images of women, which he overcame by the power of prayer. He is often remembered for this in Christian art. Later, he moved to a tomb, where he closed the door on himself, relying on local villagers to bring him food. It was said that when the devil saw his ascetic life and intense prayer he was envious and beat him, leaving him unconscious. When friends came to visit him and found him in this state, they carried him to a church. After he recovered, he made a second effort and went back into the desert to a farther mountain. There he lived for some twenty years enclosed in an abandoned Roman fort. According to Athanasius, the devil again resumed his war against Anthony, only this time in the form of animals, such as wolves, lions, snakes and scorpions. They seemed as if they were about to attack him, but he would laugh at them saying, 'If any of you had authority over me, one alone would have been sufficient to fight me.' At his saying this, they disappeared. While in the fort, he communicated with the outside world by a crevice through which food was passed and he would say a few words. He would prepare a quantity of bread that would last for six months. He did not allow anyone to enter his cell; whoever came to him remained outside.

One day he emerged from the fort with the help of villagers who broke down the door. By this time most had expected him to have wasted away, or gone insane in his solitary confinement, but he emerged healthy, serene, and enlightened. Everyone was amazed that he had been through these trials and emerged spiritually

rejuvenated. He was hailed as a hero and from this time onwards the legend of Anthony began to grow.

He went to El Fayum, confirmed believers there in the faith, and then returned to his fort. In 311, wishing to become a martyr he went to Alexandria. He visited those who were imprisoned for the sake of Christ and comforted them. When the governor saw that he was confessing his Christianity publicly, not caring what might happen to him, he ordered him not to come to the city again. However, Anthony ignored this, arguing with him in order to arouse his anger so that he might be martyred, but this did not happen.

Anthony left Alexandria to return to his fort at the end of the persecutions. There, many came to visit him and hear his teachings. But he saw that these visits kept him away from worship, so he went further into the Desert. He travelled to the inner wilderness for three days, until he found a spring of water and some palm trees, and settled there. On this spot now stands the monastery of Saint Anthony the Great.

The brothers' life was centred on prayer, manual work and varying kinds of community life. Anthony used to cultivate a garden and weave mats of rushes. Their life had great influence on the development of monasticism in the Middle East, Ireland, and through the Benedictine tradition. He and his disciples were regularly sought out for words of enlightenment. Their statements and stories were later collected in the book of *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. Anthony himself is said to have spoken to those

of a spiritual disposition personally, leaving to Macarius the task of addressing others. On occasions, he would go to a monastery to visit the brothers on the outskirts of the desert beside the Nile, and then return to the desert.

One story tells how Anthony's fame spread and reached Emperor Constantine. The emperor wrote to him, praising him, and asking him to pray for him. The brothers were pleased with the emperor's letter, but Anthony paid no attention to it, saying, 'The books of God who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords teach us every day, but we do not heed what they tell us and we turn our backs on them.' The brothers, though, were insistent, saying, 'Emperor Constantine loves the church,' so he agreed to write him a letter blessing him, and praying for the peace and safety of the empire.

According to Athanasius, Anthony was one day sitting braiding palm leaves and feeling bored. He heard a voice telling him, 'Anthony, go out and see.' He went out and saw an angel. Then he stood up to pray and sat down to weave. A voice came to him saying, 'Anthony, do this and you will be well.' He never became bored again.

About 356, when Anthony felt that the day of his death approached – he was then about one hundred and five - he asked his disciples to give his staff to Macarius, a sheepskin cloak to Bishop Athanasius, another to Bishop Serapion and his hair-shirt to the brothers. He also instructed his disciples to bury his body in an unmarked, secret grave.

Anthony probably spoke only his native language, Coptic (Egyptian), but his sayings spread far and wide in translation. He left no writings.

Though Anthony himself did not organize or create a monastery, one grew around him based on his example of an ascetic and isolated life. Athanasius' biography helped propagate Anthony's ideals. Athanasius wrote, 'For monks, the life of Anthony is a sufficient example of asceticism.'

Here are some of his sayings: -  
'My life is with my brother.'

'Whoever knows the self knows everyone, and whoever loves the self loves everyone.'

'The mind is not perfectly at prayer until the one praying does not think of the self and is not aware of praying.'

'There is no need for us to go abroad to attain the kingdom of heaven, nor to cross the sea in search of virtue. As the Lord has already told us, "The kingdom of heaven is within you."'

'Wherever you are on earth, and as long as you remain on earth, the Lord is near, so do not be afraid.'

### **A short note on three Saints**

Saints Anthony of Egypt, Benedict of Norcia, and Francis of Assisi had much in common. They each: -

- felt called by God to spend time alone in prayer;
- founded a new type of religious life;
- were not ordained priests;
- became reformers of religious life and of the church - without ever intending to be such;
- had an influence beyond their time and place.

## **WHY DID THE ROMAN EMPIRE PERSECUTE CHRISTIANS?**

The early Christian community spread across the Roman Empire, especially in the east, under the protection of laws enacted for Jews. For political reasons, the empire took an open attitude to most local religions. But Judaism was different: the God of the Jews was not a local God; he made universal claims and would not co-exist along with the other gods of the empire. For its part, the empire, faced with the refusal of the Jews to compromise on this point, made special provision for them. This provision did not threaten the unity of the empire because Jews were few in number and did not attempt to make converts.

To the Roman authorities, Christians were hard to distinguish from Jews; indeed most of the first Christians were Jews. In the early years of the Christian community, it was their “Jewishness” that saved them from the wrath of the empire which was later to hit them with force. It was only from about the start of the second century that the differences between Christians and Jews became apparent to the empire.

On their terms, the emperors were correct when they saw Christianity as a threat. While they had little interest in religion *per se*, they were political fundamentalists who allowed no room for any competing loyalty or authority. They would have agreed with Mussolini, who said, ‘Everything in the State and for the State, and by

the State; nothing outside or above or against the State.’ (Cited by Luigi Sturzo, "Giuseppe Toniolo and Christian Democracy", in *Blackfriars*, Vol. XVII, No.194, May 1936, p.366) Pontius Pilate, for instance, had not been interested in Jesus’ religious teaching: ‘What is truth?’ he had asked dismissively. (John 18.38) But he was very interested in whether Jesus considered himself to be the King of the Jews. Similarly, another Roman, Gallio, ‘paid no attention to any of these [religious] things’ (see Acts 18.12-17); the empire was all that mattered.

The new attitudes of Christians became a serious problem in the case of military service, to cite one instance. (Private property and slavery, in varying degrees, were others.) Christianity was not a national religion; it was universalist in character and wanted to convert the world. It would not co-exist with other beliefs on a basis of equality. Neither would it accept that the emperor was the *summus pontifex*, the high priest. While Christians did not see themselves as a state within the state - in fact, their lifestyle and occupations were quite ordinary - but they did see a distinction between church and state. This was a distinction the Roman state was unwilling to tolerate; for it, religion was at the service of the state.

The ancient world did not know the church-state distinction we have today. Israel was a theocracy; the king was there to carry out God's will. He was a constitutional monarch, with the Law of God as the constitution - at least those were the ideals. To speak of a separation of church and state would have been

incomprehensible, if not blasphemous, to a Jew. In Greece and Rome, it was *vice versa*: the state was supreme; it fulfilled all functions, civil and religious. The *polis* was all-inclusive, and individual differences of action were subordinated to the will of the community.

Where a religion made the claims that Christianity did, then, like it or not, it had a political character. The opposing views are illustrated by the (later) statement of Emperor Constantius II (350-361) who said, 'My will is a canon,' (Cited by Thomas Owen Martin, "The Independence of the Church", in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. CXXII, No.1, January 1950, p.39), while Pope Gelasius I wrote to Emperor Anastasius I in 494: 'Two there are, august emperor, by which this world is ruled on title of original and sovereign right - the consecrated authority of the priesthood and the royal power.' (Cited by John Courtenay Murray, in *We hold these Truths*, London, 1961, p.202)

Persecution came in three waves, roughly from 64 to 96, under Nero and Domitian; local persecutions from 100 to 250; and from 304 to 312 under Decius. It has been estimated that perhaps as many as half the Christians of the empire apostatized during them. However, the community of faith survived and continued growing in numbers and influence.



### *Why did the empire stop persecuting Christians?*

Persecutions ceased when it was realised that they, the persecutions, were a greater threat to political unity than Christians were, since, for their part, the latter wished to be, and were, good citizens, and when it became apparent that persecution was not achieving its purpose. There was a realization that Christians embodied and lived by many of the qualities of the idealized Roman citizen. And this was at a time when the empire was losing faith in itself and pressure on its borders was growing stronger on all fronts. It may be near the truth to say that, vis-à-vis Christians, the emperors came to think, 'Why fight them? If you can't beat them, co-opt them.'

So, in 313, Emperor Constantine published the Edict of Milan tolerating the Christian faith, stating, 'To each man's judgment and will the right should be given to care for sacred things according to each man's free choice... to no one whatsoever should we deny liberty to follow either the religion of the Christians or any other cult which of his own free choice he has thought to be best adapted for himself.' (Bishop Stephen Neill, *The Christian Society*, Fontana, 1964, p.52, n.1)

In 380, Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the empire with many attendant privileges. The Christian community had shown that it could survive imperial persecution; whether it could survive imperial patronage was an altogether different and more complex challenge.

## **POPE SAINT FABIAN: 20 January**

Eusebius of Caesarea (*Church History*, VI. 29) relates how the Christians of Rome, having assembled to elect a new bishop, saw a dove alight on the head of Fabian, a layman and stranger to the city. Although there were several famous men among the candidates for the vacant position, this was seen as marking him out for office, and so he was at once proclaimed bishop by acclamation,

One authority refers to him as Flavian. Although, there is little authentic information about him, there is evidence that his episcopate was of some importance in the early church. He was highly esteemed by Saint Cyprian; Novatian refers to his ‘noble memory’, and he corresponded with Origen.

Fabian is said to have baptized Emperor Philip the Arab and his son, to have done some building work in the catacombs, improved the organization of the church in Rome especially the distribution of alms to the poor, kept records about the deeds of the martyrs and dealt with other local matters. According to later accounts, more or less trustworthy, Fabian sent out seven bishops as “apostles to the Gauls” to Christianize France after the persecutions under Emperor Decius had all but dissolved the small Christian communities there. He himself was one of the first to die for the faith during persecution by Decius.

Fabian was pope from 236 to 250. He was buried in the cemetery of Callistus, and the inscription on his tomb has survived.

## **SAINT SEBASTIAN: 20 January**

Sebastian is an early martyr, said to have been killed about 288 during Emperor Diocletian's persecution of Christians. Details of his martyrdom were first described by Saint Ambrose of Milan in a sermon on Psalm 118 (*Sermon 22*). He said that Sebastian came from Milan, and that he was already venerated there in the fourth century. Another account says he was from France, but taught in Milan, and was appointed as a captain of the Praetorian Guard under Emperors Diocletian and Maximian, who were unaware that he was a Christian.

Sebastian is said to have encouraged two Christian prisoners, Mark and Marcellian, who were about to be executed. Twin brothers who were deacons, they were from a distinguished family and were married, living in Rome with their wives and children. A refusal to sacrifice to the Roman gods led to their arrest. They were visited in prison by their father and mother, who tried persuading them to renounce Christianity. Sebastian not only helped them remain steadfast, but converted their parents, the other prisoners, and the local Roman prefect.

Diocletian reproached Sebastian for this supposed betrayal, and commanded him to be bound to a pole to be shot at. The archers, it was said, shot him till he was as full of shafts as a sea-urchin, and then left him for dead. A Roman, widow, Irene by name, went to retrieve

his body for burial, but found that he was still alive. She brought him to her house and nursed him back to health.

One day, as Emperor Diocletian happened to pass by, Sebastian harangued him. The emperor had him beaten to death and his body thrown into a latrine. But, in an apparition, Sebastian told a Christian widow where they might find his body undefiled and bury it in the catacombs near the apostles. Other traditions say he was clubbed to death, or beheaded.

Remains said to be his are housed in Rome in the Basilica of the Apostles, built by Pope Damasus I in 367. The church, today called Saint Sebastian outside the Walls, was rebuilt in the 1610's. Other sources say his body was carried to Soissons, in France, while a reliquary in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London is said to contain parts of it.

Sebastian is commonly depicted in art and literature tied to a post and shot with arrows. In some places, he is well-known, especially among soldiers and athletes, who wear his medal or relics as a sacramental.

Like Saint George, Sebastian was one of a class of military martyrs and soldier saints of the early Christian church whose cults originated in the fourth century and culminated in the Middle Ages in the East and the West. Details from their martyrologies may provoke skepticism, but they are useful at least in revealing to us some of the attitudes of early Christians. Such a saint

was an “athlete of Christ” and a “guardian of the heavens.” Sebastian is patron saint of a holy death.

## **SAINT AGNES: 21 January**

According to tradition, Agnes, or Ines, was born about 291 into a Christian Roman family, and suffered martyrdom on 21 January 304 at the age of twelve or thirteen during the reign of Emperor Diocletian.

Legend has it that the Roman prefect Sempronius wanted her to marry his son because of her beauty and wealth. Agnes refused, so he condemned her to death. As Roman law did not permit the execution of virgins, Sempronius had her stripped and dragged through the streets to a brothel. Various stories tell how she escaped from it with her virginity intact.

But she was re-captured, led to a stadium and tied to a stake, but the wood would not burn, or the flames turned away from her, whereupon the officer in charge drew his sword and killed her. When her blood poured to the ground, Christians soaked it up with cloths.

A few days later, her foster-sister, Emerentiana, was found praying at her tomb. On being ordered to leave the place, she refused and reprimanded the pagans for killing Agnes. She, too, was killed, and later canonized. The daughter of Constantine I, Saint Constance, was also said to have been cured of leprosy after praying at Agnes' tomb, which was decorated on the orders of Pope Damasus.

An early account of Agnes' death, stressing her steadfastness and virginity, but not the legendary features of the tradition, is given by Saint Ambrose.

An interesting custom is observed on her feast day: two lambs are brought from the Trappist abbey of Tre Fontane [Three Fountains] in Rome to the pope to be blessed. On Holy Thursday they are shorn, and from the wool is woven the *pallium* which the pope gives to newly ordained metropolitans as a sign of their position.

Agnes is represented in art as a young girl in robes, holding a palm branch in her hand and with a lamb at her feet or in her arms. Her name resembles the Latin word for a lamb, *agnus*. But it is said to be derived from the Greek adjective *hagnē* meaning *chaste, pure, sacred*. She is one of eight women commemorated in the first Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass, and is patron saint of chastity, girls, engaged couples, rape victims, virgins and gardeners.

What is being said by the story of Saint Agnes being determined to remain a virgin even at the cost of her life? Perhaps it says that a woman is not there simply to gratify a man's desires, and also that there is more to being a woman than being a wife and mother.



## **SAINT VINCENT: 22 January**

Vincent was born at Huesca in Spain, but lived in Saragossa. He was a deacon to Valerius, the bishop of Saragossa. About 304, during a period of persecution by the Roman Emperor Diocletian, they were arrested. Vincent was told he would be freed if he threw the scriptures onto a fire as a symbol of rejecting the faith. He refused, and was tortured by fire. He was then brought to trial along with Valerius. Since the bishop had a speech impediment, Vincent spoke for both. He did so with such courage that the Roman governor ordered him executed, while Valerius was only exiled.

After his death, Vincent's fellow-Christians recovered his body which they buried at what is now Cape Saint Vincent in the south-west corner of Portugal. In 1173, it was exhumed on the orders of King Afonso Henriques (1139–1185) and brought by ship to the monastery of Saint Vincent in Lisbon. This transfer of his relics is depicted on the city's coat of arms. His name has been given to islands, towns and streets in several Hispanic countries. He is the patron of Lisbon and of Valencia in Spain and is honoured in the Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox churches.

## **SAINT FRANCIS de SALES: 24 January**

Francis was born at Thorens, Annecy, France, in 1567. *de Sales* was the family name; they were minor aristocrats. The Council of Trent had ended just four years before his birth, so he was born into the world of the Counter-Reformation. He studied law in Paris, was ordained priest in 1593, and became bishop of Geneva in 1602. He brought back to the Catholic Church many Calvinists of the Chablais region of Switzerland. He worked for the education of clergy and faithful alike, insisting that the fulness of the Christian life is accessible to all. Jansenist influences, which were still prevalent until recent times, held the view that holiness was virtually out of reach for the ordinary Christian living and working in everyday society.

Francis was a contemporary of many saints: - Charles Borromeo, Philip Neri, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis Borgia, Pope Pius V, Stanislaus Kostka, John Berchmans, Aloysius Gonzaga, Felix of Cantalice, Peter Canisius, Peter Claver, Peter Fourier, John Francis Regis, Mary Magdalen de Pazzi and Jane Frances Fremiot de Chantal, who wrote of him, 'I have often noticed how gladly he left the Holy Spirit to do his work freely in souls, and he himself followed the attraction of that divine Spirit, and guided them as they were led by God, leaving them to follow the divine inspirations, rather than his instructions.'

Francis' two principal writings are *A Treatise on the Love of God* (1608) and *An Introduction to the Devout Life* (1616), of which the latter was unique in its time in that it was written with laypeople particularly in mind. A renowned preacher, he worked with Saint Jane Frances Fremiot de Chantal (see 12 August) for the foundation of the Visitation sisters in 1610. He died in 1622, and his feastday is celebrated on 24 January. He was canonized in 1665.

The following are extracts from his writings: -

‘One form of gentleness we should practise is towards ourselves. We should never get irritable with ourselves because of our imperfections. It is reasonable to be displeased and sorry when we commit faults, but not fretful or spiteful to ourselves. Some make the mistake of being angry because they have been angry, hurt because they have been hurt, vexed because they have been vexed. Besides this, all irritation with ourselves tends to foster pride and springs from self-love, which is displeased at finding that we are not perfect.’

‘Great works are not always possible to us, but, every moment, we may do small works very well, that is, with great love.’

‘Try as hard as you like, but, in the end, only the language of the heart can reach another heart, while mere words, as they slip from your tongue, don't get past your listener's ear.’ And, ‘You'll catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a barrellful of vinegar.’

A characteristic of his writing is its gentleness. By temperament, he was hot-tempered, and he struggled with it all his life; maybe the struggle helped him to be gentle.

But there was toughness, too, in what he wrote: -  
'Do not wish for crosses unless you have borne well those which have already been offered to you. It is a mistake to wish for martyrdom when we do not have the courage to endure a sharp word.'

'Victory does not lie in ignoring our weaknesses, but in resisting them.'

'The business of finding fault is very easy, that of doing better very difficult.'

He described mental prayer as 'the prayer of the heart,' saying, 'Half an hour's listening [in mental prayer] is essential except when you are very busy. Then a full hour is needed.'

And a prayer: -  
'I go to sleep with your blessing. One day my last evening will come when I will enter eternity. Let me now so live that all that I do in time may be a preparation for that last blessed peace, so that vision may follow faith, possession succeed hope, perfect union replace imperfect love, for you are my final end and greatest good. Amen.'

## **SAINTS TIMOTHY and TITUS: 26 January**

**Timothy** was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother called Eunice, and he had a grandmother called Lois; they lived in Lystra, a town in central Turkey. She was the first to become a Christian, followed by Timothy. When Saint Paul passed through Lystra on his second missionary journey, he took Timothy with him as a co-worker, referring to him as ‘my beloved and faithful child in the Lord.’ (1 Corinthians 4.17) Timothy spent some time in Corinth helping the church there in its difficulties, and also worked in Thessalonika as ‘a brother and co-worker in the Lord.’ (1 Thessalonians 3.2) He also went to Ephesus where the writer of the pastoral letters urged him to stay. (1 Timothy 1.3) He was said by Eusebius of Caesarea to have been a leader of the church in Ephesus towards the end of his life, though this is uncertain. It seems that, at one point, he was imprisoned: ‘our brother Timothy has been set free.’ (Hebrews 13.23) Two of the pastoral letters are addressed to him. There is a tradition that he died a martyr’s death in 97.

**Titus** Nothing is known of his background, though he was probably a gentile. Like Timothy, he was a disciple and associate of Saint Paul who called him ‘my partner and fellow worker.’ (2 Corinthians 8.23, and 8.6, 16f.) With Paul, he attended the council of Apostles in Jerusalem (Galatians 2.1) He worked in Corinth, and there appears to have been mutual affection and respect between him and the Corinthians. (2 Cor. 7.13-16) He

also had a mission to Dalmatia, in present-day Croatia. He was left in Crete to organize the church there, being addressed by Paul as 'my loyal child in the faith.' (Titus 1.4-5) He may have ended his days there. One of the pastoral letters is addressed to him. Paul wrote about him in 2 Corinthians 8. 16-17, 23: -

Thanks be to God who put the same concern for you [Corinthians] into the heart of Titus, for he not only welcomed our appeal but, since he is very concerned, he has gone to you of his own accord....  
As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker for you; as for our brothers, they are apostles of the churches, the glory of Christ.

Although attributed to Saint Paul, the three pastoral letters differ in content, theology, vocabulary, and style from known letters of his. They were written to leaders of settled Christian communities of the second or third generations, probably after the death of the apostles, except perhaps John. Luke has been suggested as a possible author, apart from the Pauline conclusion in 2 Timothy 3.9-22.

The communities in question seem to have had office holders, antecedents of bishops, priests and deacons. In Titus 1.5-7, bishops and elders appear to be synonymous, while the word deacon may be used in its general sense of a helper, or refer to a specific role. The writer is principally concerned with their moral qualities.

The letters give practical advice about pastoral matters in the Christian community, perhaps in response to questions raised, and are especially concerned with maintaining traditional teaching – ‘Guard the deposit of faith that has been entrusted to you.’ (1 Timothy 6.20) (Ripon Theological College at Cuddesdon, Oxford, England, had this as its motto; it was on the college crest, on notepaper and on much else including chamber pots!)

The standing of Christians in the wider community and a desire to be seen as respectable are important to their writer. (This was a concern of Luke’s vis-à-vis the Romans.) Women and slaves should be submissive. The letters show a desire to accommodate Greek culture. They recommend virtues which, though not specifically Christian, are given Christian motives.

Here are some extracts from the Pastoral Letters: -

1 Timothy

‘The only purpose of this instruction is that there should be love, coming out of pure heart, a clear conscience and a sincere faith.’ 1.5

‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’ 1.15

‘To the eternal King, the undying, invisible and only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.’ 1.17

‘God our Saviour... desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all.’ 2.3-6

‘Everything God has created is good.’ 4.4

‘We have put our trust in the living God and he is the saviour of the whole human race but particularly of all believers.’ 4.10

‘Anyone who does not look after his own relations, especially if they are living with him, has rejected the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.’ 5.8

‘We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it; but as long as we have food and clothing, let us be content with that. People who long to be rich are a prey to temptation; they get trapped into all



sorts of foolish and dangerous ambitions which eventually plunge them into ruin and destruction. The love of money is the root of all evils and there are some who, pursuing it, have wandered away from the faith, and so given their souls any number of fatal wounds.’ 6.7-10

‘Fight the good fight of the faith.’ 6.12

‘... keep the commandment without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ who, at the due time, will be revealed by God, the blessed and only ruler of all, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal, whose home is in inaccessible light, whom no man has seen and no man is able to see: to him be honour and everlasting power. Amen.’ 6.14-16

‘Warn those who are rich in this world’s goods that they are not to look down on other people; and not to set their hopes on money, which is untrustworthy, but on God who, out of his riches, gives us all that we need for our happiness. Tell them that they are to do good, and be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share – this is the way they can save up a good capital sum for the future if they want to make sure of the only life that is real.’ 6.17-19

## 2 Timothy

‘God’s gift was not a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power, and love, and self-control.’ 1.6.

‘The power of God has saved us and called us to be holy.’ 1.8

‘...Our Saviour Christ Jesus.... abolished death, and he has proclaimed life and immortality through the Good News.’ 1.10

‘Put up with your share of difficulties, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.’ 2.3

‘Remember the Good News that I carry, “Jesus Christ [is] risen from the dead.”’ 2.8

‘... the salvation that is in Christ Jesus and the eternal glory that comes with it.... We may be unfaithful, but he is always faithful, for he cannot disown his own self.’ 2.10,13

‘Anyone who tries to live in devotion to Christ is certain to be attacked.’ 3.12

‘...the holy scriptures – from these you can learn the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and can profitably be used for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding people’s lives and teaching them to be holy. This is how the man who is dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for any good work.’ 3.15-17

‘In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom...’ 4.1

‘Make the preaching of the Good News your life’s work, in thoroughgoing service.’ 4.5

‘The Lord stood by me and gave me power, so that through me the whole message might be proclaimed for all the pagans to hear.’ 4.17.

Titus

‘Grace and peace from God the Father and from Christ Jesus our Saviour.’ 1.4

‘God’s grace has been revealed, and it has made salvation possible for the whole human race and taught us that what we have to do is to give up everything that does not lead to God, and all our worldly ambitions; we must be self-restrained and lead good and religious lives here in this present world, while we are waiting in hope for the blessing which will come with the Appearing of the glory of our great God and saviour Christ Jesus. He sacrificed himself for us in order to set us free from all wickedness and to purify a people so that it could be his very own and would have no ambition except to do good.’ 2.11-14

‘When the kindness and love of God our saviour for mankind were revealed, it was not because he was concerned with any righteous actions that we might have done ourselves; it was for no reason except his own compassion that he saved us, by means of the cleansing water of rebirth and by renewing us with the Holy Spirit which he has so generously poured over us through Jesus Christ our saviour. He did this so that we should be justified by his grace, to become heirs looking forward to inheriting eternal life. This is doctrine that you can rely on.’ 3.4-8

## SAINT ANGELA MERICI: 27 January

Angela Merici was born in 1474 in a small town on the shores of Lake Garda in Lombardy, Italy. She and her older sister were orphaned when she was about ten. Together they went to live with their uncle in the town of Salò. Young Angela was very distressed when her sister suddenly died without the last sacraments. So she joined the Third Order of Saint Francis, and prayed for her sister. A legend relates that she had a vision of her in heaven.

Angela's uncle died when she was twenty, and she returned to her previous home. She believed that better Christian education was needed for young girls, so she began teaching them in her home, which she converted into a school. This gradually developed into an association of women committed to the same task. This went so well that she was invited to start another school in the city of Brescia; she accepted the offer.

In 1524, she made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. On her return, she visited Rome, where Pope Clement VII, who had heard of her success with the schools, invited her to remain in Rome. But she returned to Brescia.

In 1535, Angela chose twelve women for the foundation in Brescia of the *Company of Saint Ursula*, known today as the Ursulines. She died in 1540, and was buried in the Franciscan habit. She was canonized in 1807 by Pope Pius VII. The original convent and her

burial place were destroyed by Allied bombing during the Second World War, in March 1945, but have since been re-built.

One of her sayings is: -

Our Saviour says that a good tree, that is, a good heart as well as a soul on fire with charity, can do nothing but good and holy works. This is why Saint Augustine could say, 'Love, and do what you will' (*Ama et fac quod vis*) – that is, possess love and charity and then do what you will. It is as though he said, 'Charity cannot sin.'

Angela's life illustrates the saying that where one person's generosity meets another person's need, there lies the will of God.

## SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS: 28 January

Thomas was born in Roccasecca, Italy, in 1225 in the family castle. His parents, Landulf and Theodora, were minor nobility in the kingdom of Naples. While his brothers pursued military careers, the family expected that Thomas would follow his uncle into the abbacy of Monte Cassino; this would have been a normal career path for a younger son of Italian nobility.

At the age of five, Thomas began his education at Monte Cassino, but after war broke out between Emperor Frederick II and Pope Gregory IX, and spilled over into the abbey in early 1239, he was enrolled at a university in Naples. It was probably there that Thomas was introduced to the writings of Aristotle, Averroes (Ibn Rushd), Avicenna (Ibn Sinna) and Rabbi Moses Maimonides, all of whom would influence his thinking. It was also during his time that he came under the influence of John of St. Julian, a Dominican preacher, who was part of the effort by Dominicans to recruit devout followers. His teacher in arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music was one Peter of Ireland. (Martin Grabmann, translated by Michael Virgil, *Thomas Aquinas: His Personality and Thought*, Kessinger Publishing, 2006, p.2)

At the age of nineteen, Thomas joined the Dominicans. This displeased his family who had other priorities. In an attempt to prevent his mother from blocking his choice, the Dominicans arranged for Thomas to be removed to

Rome, and from there to Paris. However, on his way to Rome, his brothers, following Theodora's instructions, seized him and brought him back home.

He was held prisoner by his family for two years in an attempt to persuade him to forget about the Dominicans. He passed his time tutoring his sisters, and communicating with the Dominicans. Family members became desperate, but he remained determined. At one point, two of his brothers resorted to hiring a prostitute to try and seduce him. According to the story, Thomas drove her off with a poker from the fire.

By 1244, seeing that all of her attempts to dissuade Thomas had failed, Theodora, as a face-saving gesture for herself, arranged for him to escape at night through a window. She saw a "secret" escape from detention as less humiliating to her than surrender to her son's wishes. So he returned to the Dominicans.

In 1245, Thomas was sent to study at the University of Paris where he most likely met the Dominican scholar Albert (the Great). Albert appointed the reluctant Thomas director of students. When Albert was sent to teach at the new house of studies at Cologne in 1248, Thomas followed him, declining Pope Innocent IV's offer to appoint him abbot of Monte Cassino. At Cologne, when Thomas failed his first theological examination, Albert prophetically exclaimed, 'You call him the dumb ox, but in his teaching he will one day produce such a bellowing that it will be heard throughout the world.' Thomas later taught in Cologne as an



apprentice professor. One of his foundational insights was that faith and reason are in harmony, and there is no reason to fear a dialogue between them, but rather to welcome it.

In 1268, the Dominicans assigned Thomas to be master at the University of Paris, a position he held until the spring of 1272. Disputes with important Franciscans such as Saint Bonaventure made his second term of office there more difficult than the first.

In 1272, Thomas took leave from Paris when his home province called upon him to establish a house of studies in Naples. He gave time there to working on the third part of the *Summa Theologiae* while also lecturing. The *Summa* he conceived of as specifically for beginners. Thomas was both a theologian and philosopher. However, he never considered himself a philosopher, and criticized them, seeing philosophy as always ‘falling short of the true and proper wisdom to be found in Christian revelation.’ In his adult lifetime he wrote almost constantly, helped by a team of assistants, and produced a vast volume of work on a great variety of topics, including ethics, aesthetics, politics and physics.

His attitude towards heretics reflects his time. He lived in a period when the death penalty was imposed even for such offences as petty theft. He saw heresy as analogous to forgery. Forgery corrupted the means of exchange; to him, heresy corrupted people’s spiritual values, which was more serious. He said that heretics ‘deserve... death’ because, in his theology, sinners have no intrinsic right

to life. He believed that heretics should be executed after a first or second warning, because ‘The church presumes that those who relapse after being once received are not sincere in their return; hence it does not debar them from the way of salvation, but neither does it protect them from the sentence of death.’ (*Summa Theologiae*, II–II, ques.11, art.4)

His attitude towards women may have been coloured by his reading of Aristotle, his experience with his mother and his encounter with the prostitute sent by his brothers to seduce him, or by the defective medical knowledge of his time. He wrote, ‘in terms of nature’s own operation, a woman is inferior and a mistake. The agent cause that is in the male seed tries to produce something complete in itself, a male in gender. But when a female is produced, this is because the agent cause is thwarted, either because of the unsuitability of the receiving matter [the mother] itself or because of some deforming interference, as from south winds that are too wet, as we read in [Aristotle’s] *Animal Conception*.’ (*Summa Theologiae*, I, ques.91, art. 1 ad 1.) And this had consequences, ‘Since any supremacy of rank cannot be expressed in the female sex, which has the status of an inferior, that sex cannot receive ordination.’ (*Summa Theologiae*, Supplement, q.39r.)

On 6 December 1273, at the Dominican house in Naples, Thomas lingered after Matins and was seen by the sacristan to be levitating in prayer, and in tears, before an icon of Christ crucified. Christ said to him, ‘You have written well of me, Thomas. What reward

would you have for your labour?’ Thomas responded, ‘Nothing but you, Lord.’ Thomas never spoke of this afterwards or wrote about it. But, because of what he saw, he abandoned his routine and refused to dictate to his secretary, Reginald of Piperno. When Reginald begged him to get back to work, Thomas said, ‘Reginald, The end of my labours is come. All I have written seems to be like so much straw after the things that have been revealed to me.’ What triggered Thomas’ change in behaviour may have been an experience of the wonder and magnificence of God.

In 1054, a schism occurred between the Catholic Church and the churches in communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople, later known as the Eastern Orthodox. Looking to find a way to reunite them, Pope Gregory X convened the second Council of Lyons in 1274 and called Thomas to attend. At the council, Thomas’ work for Pope Urban IV concerning the Greeks, *Contra Errores Graecorum*, was to be presented. But, on his way there, riding on a donkey along the Appian Way, he struck his head on the branch of a tree and became seriously ill. He was brought to Monte Cassino to convalesce. After resting for a while, he set out again, but stopped at the Cistercian abbey of Fossanova after again falling ill. There the monks cared for him for several days, but he grew weaker. As he received the last rites he prayed, ‘I receive you, ransom of my soul. For love of you I have studied and kept vigil, toiled, preached and taught....’ He died on 7 March 1274.

Three years after his death, Etienne Tempier, archbishop of Paris, issued a document condemning 219 propositions he considered as undermining the omnipotence of God. Included in the list were twenty from Thomas' writings. Their inclusion damaged Thomas's reputation for many years. (Hans Küng, *Great Christian Thinkers*, Continuum Books, New York, 1994, [2], pp.112–114)

In 1323, Pope John XXII pronounced Thomas a saint. In 1567, Pope Pius V proclaimed him a doctor of the church, with the title of Universal Doctor, and ranked him with the four great Latin fathers: Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory, although the Council of Trent, then in session, relied more on the theology of the Franciscan Duns Scotus.

In 1879, Pope Leo XIII stated that Thomas' theology was the definitive exposition of Catholic doctrine. He directed Catholic seminaries and universities to take his teaching as the basis of their theological studies. The works for which he is best-known are the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In 1890, Thomas was declared patron of all Catholic educational establishments.

Modern ethicists both within and outside the Catholic church, notably Philippa Foot and Alasdair MacIntyre, have commented on the possible use of Thomas' virtue ethics as a way of avoiding utilitarianism or Kantian "sense of duty." Through the work of twentieth century philosophers such as Elizabeth Anscombe, especially in

her book *Intention*, Thomas' principle of double effect specifically, and his theory of intentional activity generally, have been influential. Also in recent years, the cognitive neuroscientist Walter Freeman, in a 2008 article in the journal *Mind and Matter* entitled "Nonlinear Brain Dynamics and Intention according to Aquinas," proposed that Thomism is the philosophical system explaining cognition that is most compatible with neuro-dynamics. He saw Thomas as important in re-modelling intentionality, the directedness of the mind toward what it is aware of.

Thomas's aesthetic theories, especially the concept of *claritas*, deeply influenced the literary practice of James Joyce, who extolled him as second only to Aristotle among Western philosophers. The influence of Thomas' aesthetics also can be found in the Italian writer Umberto Eco. His influence on Western thought is considerable, and much of modern philosophy was conceived in development of, or refutation of, his ideas, particularly in the areas of ethics, natural law, metaphysics, and political theory.

Thomas was also a poet. He wrote the following three Eucharistic poems, respectively, *O Salutaris Hostia*, *Tantum Ergo* and *Adoro Te devote*: -

O saving victim, opening wide  
the gates of heaven to us below;  
our foes press on from ev'ry side,  
your aid supply, your strength bestow.

To your great name be endless praise,

immortal Godhead, one in three;  
O, grant us endless length of days  
in our true native land with you. Amen.

And: -

Come, adore this wondrous presence,  
bow to Christ, the source of grace.  
Here is kept the ancient promise  
of God's earthly dwelling-place.  
Sight is blind before God's glory,  
faith alone may see his face.

Glory be to God the Father,  
praise to his co-equal Son,  
adoration to the Spirit,  
bond of love, in Godhead one.  
Blest be God by all creation  
joyously while ages run.

And: -

Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore,  
masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing more.  
See, Lord, at your service low lies here a heart  
lost, all lost in wonder at the God you are.

Seeing, touching, tasting are in you deceived;  
how says trusty hearing? That shall be believed;  
what God's Son has told me, take for truth I do;  
truth himself speak truly or there's nothing true.

Saint Thomas wrote: -

'Whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit.' (*Summa Theologiae*, I, II, ques.109, 1 ad 1)

'Contemplation consists in the simple enjoyment of the truth.'

'Truth is the conformity between the intellect and reality.' (*Summa Theologiae*, I.16.1)

'We cannot grasp what God is, but only what he is not and how other things are related to Him.' (*Summa contra Gentiles*, Book I, 30. 4)

'All that we know of God is to know that we do not know, since we know that what God is surpasses all that we can understand of him.' (*De Potentia*, ques.7, art.5, ad 14)

'Even if God's nature is in itself absolutely simple, yet we can know it only in a multiplicity of concepts.' (*Summa Theologiae*, I, ques.13, art. 4)

'Nothing which implies contradiction falls under the omnipotence of God.' (*Summa Theologiae*, I, ques.25, art.4)

'We do not pray in order to change a divine decree, but only to obtain what God has decided will be obtained through prayer.' (*Summa Theologiae*, II, II, question 83, article 2)

'God is not offended by our sins except insofar as, by them, we harm ourselves.' (*Summa contra Gentiles*, 3.122)

'It pertains to the principle of the good that it should communicate itself to others.' (*Summa Theologiae*, III, ques. 1, art.1)

'To love is to will the good of another.' (*Summa Theologiae*, I, II, ques.26, art. 4 corp. art.)

‘Every evil is based on some good.... Evil cannot exist but in good; total evil is impossible.’

‘Total joy belongs to God and requires companionship.’

‘The divine nature is really and entirely identical with each of the three Persons, all of whom can therefore be called one.’

‘If you are looking for an example of humility, look at the cross.’

‘If you are looking for the way to go, take Christ, for he is the way.’

‘Charity is never a waste of time. Tonight I have given up my prayer in order to write to you.’

‘It is not that our body feels while our mind thinks, but we, as single human beings, both feel and think.’

‘No one can live without pleasure; that is why a person without spiritual pleasures will indulge in pleasures of the flesh.’

‘God alone satisfies.’ (*On the Apostles’ Creed*, 1)

‘Creatures came into existence when the key of love opened God’s hand.’ (*Sentences*, 2, Prologue)

‘Happiness is the natural life of the person.’

‘Faith is a foretaste of the knowledge that will make us blessed in the life to come.’ (*Compendium Theologiae*, 1.2)

This is one of his prayers: -

‘God of all goodness, grant us to desire ardently, to seek wisely, to know surely and to accomplish perfectly your holy will, for the glory of your name. Amen.’

Speaking to Dominicans in 1974, Pope Paul VI urged them to be ‘Thomases more than Thomists.’



## **SAINT JOHN BOSCO: 31 January**

John Bosco was born on 16 August 1815 in Piedmont, in the north of Italy. His parents were farm-hands. They lived in a time of severe hardship following the Napoleonic wars and a three-year drought in 1817-19. He was the youngest son of three children, all boys. His mother played a leading role in his formation and personality, and was an early supporter of his ideals. When he was young, he would display his skills as a juggler, magician, and acrobat, with prayers before and after the performance.

At the age of nine, Bosco had the first of a series of dreams which played a large role in his work and outlook. This dream 'left a profound impression on him for the rest of his life,' according to his memoirs. He saw a man, who 'appeared, nobly attired, with a manly and imposing bearing.' The man said to him, 'You will have to win these friends of yours not with blows, but with gentleness and kindness. So begin right now to show them that sin is ugly and virtue beautiful.'

Poverty prevented Bosco from attending school, but, especially after his dream, he still wanted to become a priest. At that time, the priesthood was generally seen as a profession for privileged classes rather than farmers. Some biographers say his brother Antonio was the main obstacle to his hope, arguing, 'He's a farmer like us!' Nevertheless, his mother supported him, and he finally left home at the age of twelve. Having to face life by

himself at such a young age may have developed his desire to help abandoned boys. After a long time unemployed, he ended up working on a wine farm. However, although he could study by himself, he was not free to attend school for two more years.

When he was fifteen, he met an elderly priest who supported his education, so he was enabled to enter a seminary at Chieri in 1831. The seminary staff, strongly influenced by Jansenism, he found courteous but cold, and he came to believe that this was just how *not* to teach. Despite the frosty seminary atmosphere, he retained his sense of humour and light-heartedness. After ordination at the age of twenty-six, he became chaplain to a girls' boarding school in Turin. But he had many other ministries such as visiting prisoners, teaching catechism, and starting a basic school.

A group of about four hundred boys would come to it on Sundays to play and learn the catechism. This was the beginning of what came to be called the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales. Bosco and his "Oratory" moved around town for a few years, and were turned out of several places in succession. It was said that the boys were ruffians; they were, and that was why he sought them out. Two priests tried to kidnap him and have him committed to a mental hospital. After only two months in the church of Saint Martin, the neighbourhood objected to the noise. A complaint was lodged with the municipality against the group. Rumours circulated that his meetings were dangerous, even revolutionary. But

one priest encouraged him: this was Father (later Saint) Joseph Cafasso. Saints make saints.

The idea of educating the poor was indeed revolutionary at the time, and upholders of tradition were right from their point of view: what Bosco was doing *would* lead to revolution. Once the “lower orders” of society began to read and write, they would learn more about the world around them; they would start to think and to question, to ask why they were destined to be permanently second class citizens. That could only lead to demands for change, and, with it, a loss of power by those who held it. It was not in the interest of a power elite to allow that to happen, so they wanted to prevent it from starting. (In Ireland, Nano Nagle of the Presentation Sisters and Edmund Rice of the Christian Brothers experienced similar reactions.)

Undaunted, Bosco rented a shed in a new neighbourhood, and this served as the Oratory’s home. His mother moved in with him, and they began taking in orphans. Others helped, including some older boys who were “past pupils” of the Oratory. His capacity for attracting boys and adult helpers was linked to what he called his *Preventative System of Education*. He described education as a matter of the heart, saying that boys must not only be loved but know they are loved. He pointed to three components of his system: reason, religion and recreation, such as music and games - and kindness. He referred to the method Jesus used with the apostles: -

He put up with their ignorance and roughness and even their infidelity. He treated sinners with a kindness and affection that caused some to be shocked, others to be scandalized, and still others to hope for God's mercy. And so, he told us to be gentle and humble of heart.

So successful was Bosco, that, by 1856, he had five hundred boys, three workshops and a printing press.

His ideas aroused opposition, and attempts were made on his life, including a beating, an attempted stabbing and a shooting. He was protected by an enormous mastiff called *Grigio*. As is the case with many saints, much of the opposition came from within the church. Some clergy accused him of stealing people from their parishes. Others, and some politicians, viewed his gatherings of young men as a recruiting ground for revolution. He was interrogated by police on several occasions; his home was raided and the children interrogated, but no charges were laid. He said of this,

I demand justice for so many poor children, who, alarmed by repeated investigations by police officers in their usually peaceful home, cry and fear for their future. It grieves me to see them in such a state, held up to public reprobation, even by the press. I demand justice and honourable amends for them, so that they may not suffer the loss of their daily bread.

The investigations were stopped, possibly on the orders of the king of Naples, who favoured him.

In 1859, Bosco founded a society drawing on the spirituality of Francis de Sales and using his name. This was the nucleus of the Salesians, the religious order of brothers and priests that would carry on his work.

Next, in 1872, he founded a group of religious sisters to do for girls what the Salesians were doing for boys. They were called the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. Later, he founded a group of lay people to share in the work.

Bosco wanted to become a missionary but his spiritual director opposed this. When he founded the Salesians, the thought of the missions still preoccupied him, though he lacked the financial means. One night, he dreamt of being on a vast plain, inhabited by primitive peoples, who spent their time hunting, or fighting among themselves or against soldiers wearing European-style uniforms. Along came a band of missionaries, but the people massacred them. A second group appeared which Bosco at once recognized as Salesians. Astonished, he witnessed a change: the fighters laid down their arms and listened to them. The dream made a great impression on Bosco, and he tried hard to identify the men and the country of his dream. For three years, he searched among documents, trying to get information about different countries. One day, a request came from Argentina, which turned him towards the Indians of Patagonia in the south. To his surprise, a study of the people there convinced him that the country and its inhabitants were those he had seen in his dream. He regarded it as a sign from God, and started preparing a

mission there. He proposed setting up bases in safe locations from where missionary efforts could be launched. He asked for volunteers, and almost all the first Salesians came forward.

Early on, Bosco gained a reputation as a saint and miracle worker. He showed remarkable foresight in a sensitive area when he wrote,

I fear that one of ours may come to misinterpret the affection I had for the young and from the way that I received their confession, and may let himself get carried away in his behaviour towards them, and then pretend to justify himself by saying that I did the same. I fear dangers and spiritual harm.

Bosco died on 31 January 1888. His funeral was attended by many thousands. Soon after, there was a popular demand to have him canonized, though some in the church hierarchy thought him a loose cannon and a wheeler-dealer. They said he had gone behind the bishop's back to have some of his men ordained after an inadequate formation. Newspaper cartoons from the 1860's and later showed him shaking money from the pockets of old ladies or going off to America for the same purpose. Opponents, including some cardinals, blocked his canonization for many years. But Pope Pius XI had known him and declared him blessed in 1929, and canonized him on Easter Sunday 1934, giving him the title of "Father and Teacher of Youth."

Bosco's work was carried on by followers, and today Salesians have many schools, colleges and other educational institutes around the world.

## SAINT BLAISE: 3 February

The *Acts of St. Blaise*, written in Greek, gives the following account: -

Blaise, who had studied philosophy in his youth, was a doctor in Sebaste in Armenia, the city of his birth [now Sivas in Turkey], who exercised his art with ability, good-will, and piety. When the bishop of the city died, he was chosen to succeed him, by popular acclamation. His holiness was manifest through many miracles: from all around, people came to him to find cures for their spirit and their body.

In 316, Agricola, the Roman governor of Cappadocia and of Lesser Armenia, sent by the emperor Licinius to kill Christians, arrested the bishop. As Blaise was being led to prison, a mother set her only son, choking to death on a fish-bone, at his feet, and the child was cured straightaway. Despite this, the governor, unable to make Blaise renounce his faith, beat him with a stick, ripped his flesh with iron combs, and beheaded him. (E.-H. Vollet, *Grande Encyclopédie*, published in *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* "Auctarium", 1969, 278, col. 665b.)

Blaise's cult became widespread in Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. He is the patron saint of the city of Dubrovnik, and formerly the protector of the Republic of Ragusa. (Croatian: Sveti Vlaho or Sveti Blaž)



It is common for people to come to the church on his day to have their throats blessed, with the following prayer: -

‘Through the intercession of Saint Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God protect you from all illnesses of the throat, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.’

## SAINT ANSGAR: 5 February

Ansgar, or Oscar, was born near Amiens, France, in 801, the son of a noble family. After his mother's early death, he was brought up in Corbie Abbey, where he made rapid progress in his education. According to a *Life of Ansgar*, he learned in a vision that his mother was in heaven, and this changed his attitude so that he became more reflective. His pupil, successor, and eventual biographer Rimbert considered this vision, and others with it, to be the main motivation of Ansgar's life.

At this time, Emperor Charlemagne, and his son and successor, Louis the Pious, were promoting the evangelization of Northern Germany (Saxony). This was followed by missionary work in the Jutland peninsula of Denmark. Ansgar and a group of monks and other young men went there, along with the newly baptized king of the region, Harald Klak.

In 822, Ansgar was one of a number of missionaries sent to found the abbey of New Corbie (or Corvey) in Westphalia, and there became a teacher and preacher. Seven years later, in response to a request from the Swedish King Björn for a mission to the Swedes, King Louis appointed Ansgar missionary. With an assistant, the friar Witmar, he preached and made converts. They organized a congregation, with the king's steward as a prominent member. In 831, Ansgar returned to Louis' court, and was appointed archbishop of Hamburg.

This was a new diocese and had the right to send missions to the northern lands and to consecrate bishops for them. Ansgar was consecrated in 831, went to Rome and received the *pallium*, the symbol of a metropolitan, from Pope Gregory IV, and was named legate for the northern lands. This commission had previously been bestowed upon the archbishop of Reims, in France, but the jurisdiction was divided by agreement, with Reims retaining Sweden. For a time, Ansgar devoted himself to the needs of Hamburg, which was still mission territory, but with few churches. He founded a monastery and school in Hamburg; the school was intended to serve the Danish mission, but it achieved little.

After Louis died in 840, his empire was divided, and Ansgar lost the abbey of Turholt, which had been given as an endowment for his work. Then, in 845, the Danes unexpectedly raided Hamburg, destroying the church's treasures and books, and leaving the diocese in ruins. Ansgar now had neither see nor revenue. Many of his helpers deserted him, but the new king, Louis the German, came to his aid. After failing to recover Turholt for him, in 847 he awarded him the vacant diocese of Bremen, where he took up residence in 848. However, since Hamburg had been an archbishopric, the sees of Bremen and Hamburg were combined for him. This presented canonical difficulties, and also aroused the anger of the bishop of Cologne, to whom Bremen had been suffragan. But, after prolonged negotiations, Pope Nicholas I, in 864, approved the union of the two dioceses.

Through all this political turmoil, Ansgar continued his mission to the northern lands. A civil war in Denmark compelled him to establish good relations with two kings, Horik the Elder and his son, Horik II. Both assisted him until his death. He secured recognition of Christianity as a tolerated religion and permission to build a church. He did not forget the Swedish mission, and spent two years there (848-850), at a critical moment when a pagan reaction was threatened, but which he succeeded in averting. In 854, Ansgar returned to Sweden. Now a new king, Olof, ruled, who, according to Rimbert, was well disposed to Christianity. Ansgar used his influence with these kings to alleviate the worst aspects of slavery.

Ansgar died in 865, and was buried in Bremen. He became known as “The Apostle of the North.” Unfortunately, however, his work did not long outlive him, as later rulers reverted to paganism and most of what Ansgar had achieved was undone.

A crater on the moon has been named for him as Ansgarius.

## **SAINT AGATHA: 5 February**

Agatha was born in Sicily, probably in the early part of the third century. Of her existence, there seems little doubt: she is mentioned in the first Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass, along with several other women saints. Early churches were dedicated to her, and she is remembered in frescoes, mosaics, martyrologies and poems.

But the details of her life show a large measure of legend and embroidery. During persecution by the Roman Emperor Decius, she was arrested, and attempts were made to bring her to abjure the Christian faith, but she refused steadfastly. One account of her martyrdom says that she rejected sexual advances by a Roman prefect, and was sent to a brothel as punishment. Another has her using philosophical argument to oppose the Roman veneration of idols. It is said that for refusing to sacrifice to them, she was tortured by being rolled naked on a bed of live coals, and by having her breasts cut off, but an apparition by Saint Peter cured her. She died of new torments the next day.

Saint Agatha died in prison about 253. She is the patron of several towns and regions in the Mediterranean basin. An annual festival in her honour takes place in Catania, Sicily, from February 3 to 5. It culminates in an all-night procession through the city for which hundreds of thousands of residents turn out. Her self-sacrifice bears witness to her belief that there are things more important than mere survival.

## A Note on some Martyrdom

Mark Cocker, in *Rivers of Blood: Europe's Conflict with Tribal Peoples*, (Jonathan Cape, London, 1998), estimates that the number of indigenous people killed around the world in the process of European imperial expansion was around fifty million; and he considers that to be a most conservative estimate.

There are similarities in the stories of the martyrs of Uganda, Korea, Japan and China. These were closed societies coming into contact with a new and aggressive (Western) culture. There was suspicion, often well-founded, of foreigners. Missionaries were suspected of being the vanguard of colonial expansion. And sometimes they were, even knowingly, e.g. Charles de Foucauld in relation to the Tuareg.

A local ruler might see missionaries as his means of access to the outside world and come to rely on them. If he were overthrown, they could then be in jeopardy, seen by his successors as his allies.

Local rulers felt under threat from home and abroad. And frequently they were. Europe, in the nineteenth century, went through an extensive period of aggressive colonial expansion. Aided by superior fire-power, the maps of Africa and Asia were re-printed in the colours of the colonial powers: red for Britain, blue for France, yellow for Spain, etc. Local rulers were rarely without internal opposition, rivals ready to claim that they were

soft on external enemies and in cahoots with colonial powers.

Foreign powers, often determined to exploit local resources, had few scruples as to their methods. As G. K. Chesterton put it, 'We had got the Maxim gun – and they had not.' The nineteenth-century Opium Wars between Britain and China (and, later, the unequal treaties) were not *against* the opium trade; they were *for* it, instigated by Britain to force China to open itself up to the opium trade. Local rulers were liable to be ground between the merciless teeth of internal and external pressures.

Explorers, hunters, missionaries, traders, settlers, colonizers - what was the local ruler to make of them? Fight, flight or freeze? What was best? Missionaries spoke a message which often undermined local traditions. They taught that God had created all people in his image; all had been redeemed by Jesus, and all were destined for eternal life. And, in eternal life, earthly status counted for nothing. Surely they couldn't be serious? Did that include slaves? If it did, was the slave not being put on the same footing as the king? And if access to the sacraments was for everyone, did that not imply a principle of equality which called into question local social hierarchy? The implications of Christian teaching were far-reaching, in some cases more so than even some of the missionaries themselves realized. And missionaries owed allegiance to a foreign ruler of some sort, whether a colonial governor or a pope. They often came from the same country, spoke the same language,

and were on friendly terms with colonial officials. Could they be trusted?

Attitudes of racial superiority by Europeans towards non-Europeans were not only commonplace; they were seen by Europeans as no more than an expression of the obvious. These attitudes were sometimes reciprocated by the host peoples. It was common for Chinese to look on non-Chinese as ‘foreign devils’, or ‘barbarians’, while many Japanese looked down on non-Japanese as *gaijin*. (The word literally means a foreigner, but with a pejorative connotation, such as alien. Other languages have similar usages, such as *farang* in Thai, *pakeha* in New Zealand Maori, *wazungu* in Kiswahili, or *goyim* in Hebrew.) These attitudes fed mutual misunderstanding.

It is not difficult to imagine an agitator manipulating these situations to his advantage. Paint the ruler as weak, or a fool; whisper about his relations with the strange newcomers, and his throne might become shaky. People, faced with rapid change, sometimes imposed by force, and unable to understand it, become afraid. And fear is a bad counsellor. It is easy to find a few victims; scapegoat them, get rid of them, and maybe the problem will go away. Perhaps there was some such political process at work in the martyrdom of missionaries that took place in many countries in the nineteenth century.

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See also “Why did the Roman Empire persecute Christians?”



On a different note, some of the early Fathers of the Church had a problem about Agatha and other women martyrs: since it was a well-known fact that women were naturally foolish, fickle and feeble-minded, where did they find the strength to become martyrs? The answer of Jerome, Ambrose, Basil and Gregory was that, for the occasion, by God's grace, they became honorary men. (Garry Wills, *Papal Sin*, p.120, n.25.)

## **SAINT PAUL MIKI and Companions: 6 February**

Paul Miki was born into a wealthy Japanese military family in 1562. He was educated by the Jesuits and then joined them. While still a seminarian, he became a well-known preacher, gaining numerous converts to the Catholic faith.

The local Japanese ruler (the *daimyo*), fearful of the influence and intentions of foreigners, and even more so of their local associates during a time of civil conflict, began persecuting Catholics. Miki was jailed, along with others. He and his fellow Catholics were force-marched several hundred kilometres from Kyoto to Nagasaki. It is said that they sang the hymn, *Te Deum*, while marching. The point of the march was to let everyone know what the consequences of conversion to Christianity would be.

On arriving in Nagasaki, the city with the largest Catholic population in Japan, Miki was crucified on 5 February 1597. He preached his last sermon from the cross, saying,

The only reason for my being killed is that I have taught the doctrine of Christ. I thank God it is for this reason that I die. I believe that I am telling the truth before I die. I know you believe me, and I want to say to you all once again: ask Christ to help you become happy. I obey Christ. After Christ's example, I forgive my persecutors. I do not hate

them. I ask God to have pity on all, and I hope my blood will fall on my country-men as a fruitful rain.

Crucified alongside him were João Soan de Gotó and Santiago Kisai, also of the Society of Jesus, along with twenty-three other priests and people, all of whom were canonized by Pope Pius IX in 1862. Among the Japanese laymen who suffered the same fate were: -

- Francis, a carpenter who was arrested while watching the executions, and then crucified;
- Gabriel, the nineteen year old son of the Franciscans' porter;
- Leo, a twenty-eight year old carpenter;
- Diego, a co-worker of the Jesuits;
- Joachim, a cook for the Franciscans;
- Peter, sent by a Jesuit priest to help the prisoners, but who was then arrested;
- Cosmas, who had preached in Osaka; and
- Ventura, who had been baptized by the Jesuits, gave up the faith on the death of his father and became a Buddhist monk, but was brought back to the faith by the Franciscans.

## **SAINT JEROME EMILIANI: 8 February**

Jerome was born in Venice in 1481, the son of Eleanor and Angelo Emiliani. He joined the army and took part in battle in 1508. He was taken prisoner, but was liberated by a miracle, it was said. The experience of war changed him, making him determined to devote his energy to caring for people. He made a pilgrimage to a shrine of Our Lady in fulfilment of a vow. He was appointed magistrate of Castelnuovo, but after a short time returned to Venice to supervise the education of his nephews. His spare time was devoted to the study of theology and to works of charity. He was ordained priest in 1518.

Hospitals and the homes of the poor were the focus of his efforts. In 1528, a year of plague and famine, he seemed to be everywhere, caring especially for orphans, whose number had greatly increased. He rented a house for them near the church of Saint Rose, and, with the assistance of some laymen, served their needs. To his care was also committed the hospital for incurables, founded by Saint Cajetan. In 1531, he went to Verona and persuaded the citizens to build a hospital. In Brescia, Bergamo, Milan and other places in northern Italy, he erected orphanages for boys and for girls.

Two priests, Alexander and Augustine, joined him in works of charity. In 1532, he founded a religious society, placing the motherhouse at Somascha, a hamlet between Milan and Bergamo, after which the members became

known as the Somaschi. In the *Rule* of this society, Jerome stated that the principal work of the community was the care of orphans, the poor and the sick; he insisted that dwellings, food and clothing bear the mark of religious poverty.

At Bergamo, Jerome contracted a disease, perhaps from those in his care, and died at Somascha in 1537. He was canonized by Pope Clement XIII in 1767, and is the patron saint of orphans and abandoned children.

## SAINT JOSEPHINE BAKHITA: 8 February

Bakhita was born in Darfur, Sudan, about 1869. She belonged to a well-respected and reasonably prosperous family with three brothers and three sisters who followed a traditional African religion. She said in her autobiography, ‘I lived a very happy and carefree life, without knowing what suffering was.’

Sometime between the age of seven and nine, she was kidnapped by Arab slave raiders, who already had kidnapped her older sister two years earlier. She was forced to walk nearly 1,000 km. to El Obeid on bare feet, and was sold twice before arriving there. Over the course of twelve years (1877–1889) she was resold three more times and then given away. It is said that the trauma of her abduction caused her to forget her own name; she took one given to her by the slavers: *Bakhita*, Arabic for *fortunate*. She was also forcibly converted to Islam.

In El Obeid, Bakhita was bought by an Arab merchant who employed her as a maid to his daughters. They liked her and treated her well. But after offending one of her owner's sons, possibly for breaking a vase, he lashed and kicked her so severely that she spent more than a month unable to move from bed. Her next owner was a Turkish general. She had to serve his mother-in-law and wife who both were very cruel to all their slaves. She said: ‘During all the years I stayed in that house, I do not recall a day passing without some wound or other. When

one wound from a whip began to heal, other blows would pour down on me.’

Bakhita said that the most terrifying of all her memories from there was when she, with other slaves, was marked by a process of scarification. As her mistress watched, whip in hand, flour, salt, and a razor were brought. A woman used the flour to draw patterns on her skin, and then cut deeply along the lines with the razor before filling the wounds with salt to ensure permanent scarring. A total of one hundred and fourteen patterns were cut into her breasts, stomach, and right arm.

Bakhita’s owner sold her to the Italian consul, Callisto Legnani, in 1883. He took her to Italy two years later, fleeing from the wars begun by Sheik Muhammad Ahmed, the Mahdi, who captured Khartoum in 1885. Still a slave, he gave her as a present to another family who brought her to live in Venice. They put her into the care of the Canossian Sisters while they returned to Sudan to deal with their affairs. On coming back to Italy, the family went to collect her from the sisters, but Bakhita refused to leave the convent, supported by the sisters who argued her case because she was a catechumen, namely, that she was preparing for baptism. The case went to court in 1889; it ruled that Italy did not recognize slavery, and that Bakhita, after twelve years a slave, was therefore free. For the first time in her life she found herself in control of her own destiny. She chose to remain with the sisters, saying, ‘I am loved, and, whatever happens to me, I am awaited by this love. So my life is good.’ She was experiencing a new life, and a

new Master whom she could love instead of fear, one who had been flogged as she had.

On 9 January 1890, Bakhita was baptised with the names of Josephine Margaret Fortunata (the Italian for Bakhita.) On the same day she was also confirmed and made first Communion. The confirming bishop was Giuseppe Sarto, the future Pope Saint Pius X. In 1893, she entered the novitiate of the Canossian Sisters and, on 8 December 1896, made her profession of vows. In 1902, she was assigned to a convent in Vicenza, where she spent the rest of her life, except for four years which she spent preparing young sisters for work in Africa. A strong missionary spirit animated her throughout her life. It was said that, ‘Her mind was on God, but her heart was in Africa.’

During her next forty-two years, Josephine worked as cook, sacristan, and door-keeper, and was in frequent contact with local people. Her gentleness, calm voice and smile became well known, and people referred to her as Sor Moretta (*Little Brown Sister*). Her reputation for holiness led to the publication of her story in 1931; this made her famous throughout Italy. During World War II, she shared the fears and hopes of the people, who considered her a saint and felt protected by her presence. The town was bombed, but without casualties.

Her last years were marked by pain and illness, but she retained her cheerfulness. If asked how she was, she would always smile and answer, ‘As the Master desires.’ In her last hours, her mind went back to her slavery, and



she cried out, 'The chains are too tight; loosen them a little, please!' After a while she came round again. Someone asked her, 'How are you? Today is Saturday.' 'Yes, I am so happy. Our Lady... Our Lady!' Those were her last words. She died on 8 February 1947. For three days her body lay in state while thousands of people paid their respects.

Someone once asked Josephine: 'What would you do if you were to meet your captors?' Without hesitation she replied, 'If I were to meet those who kidnapped me, even those who tortured me, I would kneel and kiss their hands. For, if those things had not happened, I would not have been a Christian and a religious today.'

In 2000, she became Saint Josephine Bakhita. She has been adopted as the patron saint of Sudan, and is venerated as a statement against slavery. Her legacy is that transformation is possible. Her story of deliverance from physical slavery symbolizes also deliverance from other forms of slavery, such as addictions or habits of sin. It is also the story of a person forced to convert to Islam but freely choosing Christianity. (News of her canonization was banned by the Sudanese government.) Pope John Paul II visited Sudan in 1993, and declared, 'Rejoice, all of Africa! Bakhita has come back to you. The daughter of Sudan sold into slavery as living merchandise, is free with the freedom of the saints.'

## SAINT SCHOLASTICA: 10 February

Saint Scholastica was born in Italy about 480, the twin sister of Saint Benedict of Norcia. She dedicated herself to God from a young age, perhaps before him. Saint Gregory the Great, in his *Dialogues*, says that she was leader of a community of women living at a place called Plombariola about eight km. from Benedict's abbey at Monte Cassino. We do not know what *Rule* her community followed, though it seems likely it was that of Saint Benedict. She may also have been a pioneer of religious life for women in Italy.

There is a tradition that, once a year, she used to go to visit Benedict at a place near his abbey, and they would spend the day praying and talking. One year, at the end of such a meeting, they had supper and continued their conversation. When Benedict indicated that it was time for him to leave, she asked him to stay for the evening so they could continue their conversation. He refused, insisting that he had to return to his monastery. At that point, Scholastica closed her hands in prayer, and after a moment, a wild storm started outside the house. Benedict asked, 'What have you done?' to which she replied, 'I asked you and you would not listen, so I asked God and he listened. So now, go off, if you can, and return to your monastery.' Benedict was unable to return, so they spent the night in conversation. According to Gregory's *Dialogues* (Chapter 33), three days later, from his room, he saw his sister's soul leaving the earth and ascending to heaven in the form of a white dove.

Scholastica died on 10 February 547. She is the patron saint of nuns and is invoked against storms and rain. She is venerated in the Eastern Orthodox Churches also.

## **SAINTS CYRIL and METHODIUS: 14 February**

Methodius was born into a wealthy and politically significant family in Saloniki, Greece, about 815, and Constantine, his brother, some twelve years later. (Constantine took the name of Cyril on becoming a monk just fifty days before his death in Rome on 14 February 869.) Educated in Constantinople, they were ordained priest. Later on, Methodius was made archbishop of the diocese of Sirmium in Hungary, where he spent many years. He outlived his younger brother by sixteen years, and died at Velehrad (Nitra?) in the Czech Republic on 6 April 885.

Cyril was a philosopher, a theologian, a linguist and a teacher. He undertook missions to the Islamic Caliph, and to a Jewish kingdom near the Sea of Azov in Ukraine and Russia. His mission there was to prevent the spread of Judaism; to further this he wrote some strongly anti-Semitic polemics. However, he is best remembered because, along with Methodius and others, and using Greek as a basis, he helped develop two new alphabets to suit the Slavic languages of Eastern Europe, such as Russian and Bulgarian. The first was the Glagolitic, which was used to transcribe the Old Slavonic liturgy, and the second, which developed from it, came to be called the Cyrillic, after him. Cyril's authorship of the alphabet was confirmed by the papal letter *Industriae tuae* of 880 approving the use of Old Church Slavonic, which says that the alphabet was 'invented by Constantine the Philosopher.' Before then the Slavic

languages had no distinct script of their own. Their team translated the New Testament, the Psalms and other parts of the Bible into local languages, and developed a Slavonic liturgy, the one still substantially used today in the Russian Orthodox Church. The brothers' efforts paved the way for the spread of Christianity throughout Eastern Europe.

They also wrote the first Slavic *Civil Code*, which was used in Moravia. These works influenced the cultural development of all the Slav peoples.

The two brothers began missionary work about 860, first in Bulgaria, then in Moravia in today's Czech Republic, where they followed others. The local ruler there invited them because he wanted the liturgy and the Bible in the local language. This aroused opposition in some German church circles which were already established there. For a time, Methodius was imprisoned. Some said their liturgy was unorthodox, but Methodius was supported by Pope John VIII. There was a great deal of political infighting in all of the above. For example, the brothers were sponsored by the Eastern Empire in their early work as a way of expanding its influence in eastern and central Europe; there was also church rivalry between Rome and Constantinople.

They became known as "the Apostles of the Slavs," and, along with Saint Benedict, were declared co-patrons of Europe in 1980. They were men from Central Europe who built bridges between Eastern (Orthodox) Europe and Western (Latin) Europe, personifying one of the

(unfulfilled) hopes of Pope John Paul II that Europe would one day, as he put it, ‘breathe with both lungs.’ He saw their life and work as having relevance to the process of European unification today, stating,

Their work is an outstanding contribution to the formation of the common Christian roots of Europe, roots which by their strength and vitality are one of the most solid points of reference, which no serious attempt to reconstruct in a new and relevant way the unity of the Continent can ignore. (Encyclical letter, *Slavorum Apostoli*, 2 June 1985, n.25)

Pope Benedict XVI spoke of them as ‘models of dialogue between cultures’ saying that it was thanks to them that

the Good News of Christ reached the inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe in their own language, and a new culture, nourished by the Gospel and Christian tradition, was born and was able to develop under their guidance through the liturgy, the law and the institutions, until it became the common good of the Slavic peoples. (Address on receiving a new Bulgarian ambassador, 13 May 2006)

The Orthodox Church gives them the title of “Equal to the Apostles.”

The work of Cyril and his team in developing an alphabet made a greater difference than they might have

imagined. We get an inkling of this from an earlier period in the same region: -

At the time that we are considering, the early developments of the Russian empire were taking place around Kiev under two leaders, Svyatoslav, and his son, Vladimir. They consciously chose to ally their development with the west rather than with the nomadic east in Siberia. They sent an ambassador to Byzantium to enter into contact with this great centre of culture. The ambassadors reported back, ‘The Greeks led us to their edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth, there is no such splendour or such beauty, and we were at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells here among men, and that their worship is more beautiful than the ceremonies of other nations. We cannot forget that beauty.’

The lasting effect of this experience was that Russia became Christian rather than Muslim. The consequences of that fact for Europe cannot be measured. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that the liturgy in the Byzantine church was its greatest asset in maintaining a sense of unity which sustained it for a further seven centuries in the face of Muslim pressure. Had Constantinople fallen to the Muslims a few centuries earlier, the history of the Christian church might well be totally different today. (From the twelfth-century *Russian Primary Chronicle*,

cited by Bishop Stephen Neill, *The Christian Society*, Fontana, 1964, p.89, n.10.)



## **SEVEN HOLY SERVITE FOUNDERS: 17 February**

The seven founders of the Order of Servites of Mary came from Florence in the thirteenth century. They were members of patrician families who gathered in a fraternity called the *Praisers of Mary*, devoted to the honour of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. They are said to have had a vision of Mary on the feast of the Assumption in 1233, in which she urged them to withdraw from the world and devote themselves to eternal things. In a later vision in 1240, she gave them a black habit and urged them to found an order based on the Rule of Saint Augustine and devoted to her service, especially in her desolation during the Passion of Jesus.

The new foundation was approved by Pope Innocent IV in 1249, but this positive outcome did not last long. The Second Council of Lyons in 1274 put into effect the decision of the Fourth Lateran Council, forbidding the foundation of new religious orders, and suppressing all mendicant institutions not yet approved by the Holy See. And so, in 1276, Pope Innocent V suppressed the order. Its leader, Philip Benizi, appealed and won support from various cardinals. Finally, the suppression was annulled and the order won definitive approval from Pope Benedict XI in 1304.

By the fourteenth century, the Servites had grown rapidly and spread across Europe in a hundred houses, and later to India and the Philippines. They suffered many setbacks during the Reformation, and in

revolutions in various European countries. But in the twentieth century, they expanded to Southern Africa, South America, India and Australia. Previously suppressed foundations in Albania, the Czech Republic and Hungary were restored after the collapse of Communism. In addition to the Servite friars, there are also Servite nuns, a Third Order of lay men and women, and a confraternity.

The seven founders were canonized in 1888. One of them, Alexis Falcionieri, is said to have died on 17 February.

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In the long history of religious life in the church, those orders founded around a particular devotion, e.g. to the Blessed Sacrament or to Our Lady, or around a specific apostolate such as teaching or nursing, tend not to have lasted a very long time, while those founded simply for the observance of the Gospel – while also undertaking various apostolates – have lasted longer. The Benedictines or Franciscans come to mind as examples of the latter.

## SAINT PETER DAMIAN: 21 February

Peter was born in Ravenna, Italy, about 1007, was orphaned early, but, after a youth spent in hardship and privation, showed such signs of intellectual gifts that his brother, Damian, who was a priest at Ravenna, sent him to be educated. Adding his brother's name to his own, Peter made such rapid progress in his study that by the age of twenty-five he was already a famous teacher.

About 1035, however, he left his position as teacher and entered a hermitage, living by the Rule of Saint Benedict. Perhaps with this period of his life in mind, he later wrote, 'In silence and solitude... one is occupied in busy leisure and rests in quiet activity.' As novice and monk, his fervour was remarkable but led him to such extremes of penance that his health was affected. On his recovery, he was appointed to teach his fellow-monks in several monasteries. About 1042, he wrote a life of Saint Romuald in which he developed the teaching of the Rule of Saint Benedict that a monk should, 'Prefer nothing, absolutely nothing, to the love of Christ.' The following year, he became prior of his house and held the office till his death.

Peter is known most of all as a reformer of church life. He introduced the use of the discipline, a metal chain used in self-flagellation; but also – very wisely - introduced the *siesta*, to make up for sleep lost during the night office! He used to say, 'Strengthen your

patience with understanding, and look forward serenely to the joy that comes after sadness.’

Although living in the cloister, Peter Damian was keenly interested in the affairs of the church. He saw eremitical and monastic life as expressions of the love of Jesus for his Father and how that love expressed itself in love of the church. He strove for reform at a time when powerful families and civil rulers controlled dioceses and sometimes even the papacy, using them for personal enrichment and status-seeking. Peter urged Pope Gregory VI to deal with the scandals of the church in Italy. He attended a synod at the Lateran in 1047, in which decrees were issued against simony, that is, trafficking in sacraments and ecclesiastical offices.

About 1050, Peter wrote a scathing treatise on the vices of the clergy, including sexual abuse of minors and concealment of these crimes by church leaders. This book, the *Liber Gomorrhianus* (*Book of Gomorrah*) he addressed to Pope (later Saint) Leo IX. One of its features is its compassion for the victims of such practices. The pope did not act with the decisiveness that Peter expected, and this led to coolness between them. It was later said that perhaps the pope thought Peter was exaggerating. Meanwhile, a question arose as to the validity of ordination of simoniacal clerics. About 1053, Peter wrote a treatise, the *Liber Gratissimus*, in favour of their validity, a work which was influential in deciding the question in their favour.

He condemned philosophy and grammar. He said that the Devil was the first grammarian, teaching Adam to give the word *deus* (god) a plural. He held that monks should not have to study philosophy, because Jesus did not choose philosophers as disciples and so philosophy was not necessary for salvation. But the idea, later attributed to Saint Thomas Aquinas, that philosophy should serve theology as a servant serves her mistress originated with him. This may reflect his view that logic is concerned only with the validity of an argument rather than with its truth. A similar view is found in the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (died 1951).

Peter's personal preference was for the life of a wandering hermit-preacher, and he pleaded to be released from ecclesiastical responsibilities, but the popes would not allow him. In his book on the church, *Dominus Vobiscum (The Lord be with you)*, he wrote: -

Although the church is diverse in the multiplicity of her members, she is nevertheless welded into one by the fire of the Holy Spirit. If she seems divided into parts across bodily space, the sacrament of her interior unity is nonetheless too strong for her own integrity to be disrupted. (6, *A Letter to a Hermit*; PL 145.235)

And,

If believers in Christ are one, then wherever one member is, there is the whole body by the

sacramental mystery. Whatever belongs to the whole in some way fits in with any part.

Peter was made bishop and cardinal in 1057 by Pope Stephen IX, a former monk of Monte Cassino. He wrote a letter to his brother-cardinals, exhorting them to lead by example. But when Pope Stephen died, the church was once more disturbed by schism. Peter was vigorous in his opposition to the antipope Benedict X, but physical force was on Benedict's side and, for the moment, Peter had to withdraw.

In 1059, Peter was sent to Milan by Pope Nicholas II to reform the church there. Church offices were openly sold and priests married their mistresses. The local clergy opposed Peter, arguing that Rome had no authority over Milan. But he confronted them in the cathedral, arguing for the authority of the Holy See with such vigour that they accepted his decisions. He exacted an oath from the archbishop and clergy that in future no office should be paid for. He imposed penance on the guilty, but re-instated all who undertook to live in celibacy. In his attempts to reform the clergy, he was as concerned about their living lives of gospel poverty as with their chastity, saying, 'Nobody can fight properly and boldly for the faith if he fears losing his possessions.' Unfortunately, on the pope's death, the same disputes broke out again and were not finally settled for several more years.

Peter helped Pope Alexander II in his struggle with the antipope, Honorius II. In 1061, Alexander died, and once

more schism ensued. Peter tried persuading the antipope Cadalous to withdraw, but without effect. Finally the archbishop of Cologne and acting regent in Germany, summoned a council at Augsburg at which a long argument by Peter Damian was read and contributed to a decision in favour of Alexander II.

In 1063, the pope held a synod at Rome, at which Damian was appointed legate to settle a dispute between the abbey of Cluny and the bishop of Mâcon. He went to France, and succeeded in settling the issue. But, while there, the antipope Cadalous again tried for recognition as pope. Surprisingly, Peter appealed to the French king to judge the case. For this he was sharply criticized by Pope Alexander and Hildebrand, the future Pope Saint Gregory VII.

In 1067, Peter was sent to Florence to settle a dispute between monks and a bishop they accused of simony. It seems that he misjudged the case and it took the intervention of the pope the following year to settle the matter.

He wrote a great deal, and his writings reflect his concerns. 'The world is daily deteriorating into a worthless condition.... Decency has gone, honesty disappeared, religious devotion has fallen on bad times.' (*Peter Damian Letters 151-180*, Owen J. Blum and Irven M. Resnick, Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 2005, Letter 165, pp.170-171, cited by Jon M. Sweeney, *The Pope who Quit: a True Medieval Tale of Mystery, Death and Salvation*, Image Books,

New York, 2012, pp.187-188.) He referred to himself simply as ‘a sinner-monk.’ He was a vigorous controversialist, pulling no punches in the language of denunciation. He was devoted to the Virgin Mary and wrote an *Office* in her honour, in addition to many letters, sermons, and other writings. His most famous work is a letter called *On the Omnipotence of God*, in which he proposed the startling view that God can make a past event not to have happened.

Despite being allowed to resign his position as bishop of Ostia and go into retirement in his beloved Fonte Avellana, he was sent in 1069 to Germany to try to dissuade Emperor Henry IV from divorcing his wife, Bertha; he was successful.

Then, in 1072, he was sent to Ravenna to reconcile its people to the Holy See; they had been excommunicated for supporting antipope Cadalous. He achieved this reconciliation, but, on his return, became ill with fever. He died on the night of 21-22 February 1072, and was buried at once in the monastery church, lest others claim his relics. He did not live to see his friend, Hildebrand, become Pope Gregory VII the following year but his life and work were significant steps in preparing the way for Gregory.

Peter was never formally canonized, but, in 1828, Pope Leo XII declared him doctor of the church. Dante placed him in one of the highest circles of *Paradiso* as a predecessor of Saint Francis of Assisi. He exercised much influence on the later (1209-1296) Pope Saint



Celestine V, who resigned after only fifteen weeks in office.

## SAINT POLYCARP: 23 February

There are two principal sources of information about Polycarp: the first is in the letters of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, including one to him and another to the Smyrnaeans, recounting his martyrdom. The *Martyrdom* is considered one of the earliest genuine accounts from the age of the persecutions of a Christian martyrdom. The second is a number of passages in Saint Irenaeus of Lyons' *Against Heresies*. These include Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians*. Drawing heavily on the Greek Scriptures, it is the sole surviving work attributed to him. These form part of the body of writings attributed to the *Apostolic Fathers*, so called to emphasize their closeness to the apostles in church tradition, and their role as a link with the developing early Christian community.

Polycarp was born about 69 AD at Smyrna (now Izmir) in Turkey. According to Irenaeus, he was a companion of Papias, who was another "hearer of John," and a correspondent with Ignatius of Antioch. Ignatius addressed a letter to him, and mentions him in his letters.

Irenaeus stated in a letter to Florinus that Polycarp knew John the Apostle, 'and the rest of those who had seen the Lord.' In his youth, Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp's, had heard him preach, and said that he was, 'a man of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics.' He related how and when Polycarp became a Christian. In particular, he heard the account of

his discussion with "John the Presbyter" and with others who had seen Jesus. He reports that Polycarp was converted to Christianity by apostles and ordained a bishop. He repeatedly emphasizes Polycarp's great age. The early Christian writer Tertullian also spoke of Polycarp as a disciple of John's and states that John appointed him bishop of Smyrna. (*De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, 36) Some have disputed this on the grounds that the only known writing of Polycarp's does not quote John.

According to Irenaeus, Polycarp visited Rome about 160, while Anicetus was bishop. They discussed differences that existed between Asia and Rome, especially concerning the time of Easter. Irenaeus said that on certain things the two bishops quickly reached agreement, but, regarding the time of Easter, each adhered to his own custom, not making differences into divisions. Polycarp followed the eastern practice of celebrating Easter on the day of the Jewish Passover, regardless of what day of the week it fell on. Anicetus invited Polycarp to celebrate the Eucharist in his own church. Irenaeus states that, on his visit to Rome, Polycarp's testimony converted many heretics.

According to the *Martyrdom*, Polycarp died, bound and burned for refusing to offer incense to the Roman emperor. In the account of his death, he is recorded as saying to his tormentors, 'Eighty-six years I have served God,' which could indicate that he was then eighty-six years old, or perhaps that it was eighty-six years since his conversion. He went on, 'How then can I blaspheme

my King and Saviour? Do what you want.’ When his captors considered nailing him to the pyre, he said, ‘Leave me as I am. The one who gives me strength to endure the fire will also give me strength to stay quite still on the pyre, even without the precaution of your nails.’ (*From the Letter of the Church at Smyrna to the Church at Philomelium*)

The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* quotes him as saying: -

I bless you [God] for having judged me worthy from this day and this hour to be counted among your martyrs... You have kept your promise, God of faithfulness and truth. For this reason and for everything, I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you, through the eternal and heavenly high priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. Through him, who is with you and the Holy Spirit, may glory be given to you, now and in the ages to come. Amen. (14.2-3; PG 5.1040; *Sources Chrétiennes*, Paris, 1942, 10.228)

The language used here is liturgical; it presents Polycarp the martyr as a kind of Eucharist.

The date of his death is uncertain: Eusebius dates it to the reign of Marcus Aurelius, about 166 or 167. But an addition to the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* dates it to Saturday, 23 February, in 155 or 156. The earlier dates better fit the tradition of his association with Ignatius and John the Evangelist.

Polycarp lived after the death of the apostles, when a variety of interpretations of the sayings of Jesus was being preached. His role was to authenticate orthodox teachings through his connection with the apostle John.

A high value was attached to the witness Polycarp could give as to the genuine tradition of old apostolic doctrine, his testimony condemning as offensive novelties the figments of the heretical teachers. (Henry Wace, *Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature to the End of the Sixth Century A.D., with an Account of the Principal Sects and Heresies*, s.v. "Polycarpus, bishop of Smyrna".)

Surviving accounts of the bravery of this very old man in the face of death by burning at the stake added credence to his words. His death strengthened the faith of contemporary Christians: -

We worship Christ as God's Son; we love the martyrs as the Lord's disciples and imitators, and rightly so because of their matchless devotion towards their king and master. May we also be their companions and fellow disciples! (*Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 17; Apostolic Fathers II/3, 396)

Polycarp occupies an important place in the history of the early Christian church. He is among the earliest Christians whose writings survive. He was an elder of a congregation which contributed substantially to the founding of the Christian church, and he may have been a compiler, editor, and publisher of the New Testament.

With Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, he is regarded as one of three chief Apostolic Fathers.

The following is one of his prayers: -

May God the Father and the eternal High Priest Jesus Christ build us up in faith and truth and love, and grant us a share among the angels and saints. Amen.

## **SAINT CASIMIR: 4 March**

A member of the Jagiellonian dynasty, Casimir was born at the Wawel castle in Krakow, Poland, in 1458. He was the third child and second son of Casimir IV, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, and of Elisabeth von Habsburg, Queen of Hungary. Elisabeth was a loving mother, active in her children's upbringing. They often accompanied the king on his visits to Lithuania.

From the age of nine, Casimir and his older brother Vladislaus II were educated by a Polish priest who taught them Latin, German, law, history, rhetoric and classical literature. The priest was strict, emphasizing morality and devotion. Casimir grew up showing ability as a public speaker.

In 1457, the death of the king of Hungary and Bohemia led to a claim on those countries by King Casimir, but, because of other current wars, he could do nothing for a long time. Then, in October 1471, he invaded Hungary, accompanied by Casimir his son, whom he intended installing as king. But, after a desultory campaign marked by disease, shortage of food, lack of money, and unpreparedness for winter, the Poles withdrew and Casimir was sent back to Krakow. He felt great shame at the defeat in Hungary, but, publicly, was represented as a hero who had saved his people from a godless Hungarian king and marauding pagans – the Ottoman Turks.

Casimir's older brother had been made king of Bohemia, so Casimir became heir to the Polish throne. He spent much time with his father on affairs of state in Prussia and Lithuania. A foiled assassination plot led to his being sent back to Poland for safety.

His father tried to arrange a marriage for him with Kunegunde, daughter of the emperor of Austria, but nothing came of this, perhaps because Casimir was showing signs of ill-health. Whatever the cause - it may have been tuberculosis – he became seriously ill and died in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 4 March 1484, at the age of twenty-five. His remains were interred in the cathedral there, where they still rest.

Early sources do not attest to his devotion, but his inclination to prayer increased towards the end of his life. Contemporary accounts described him as a young man of exceptional intellect and education, humility and politeness, striving for justice and fairness. He was said to have been generous to the poor, and, for this reason, has been depicted as having two right hands. Later sources state that he contracted lung disease after hard fasting, and that he could be found before dawn kneeling by church gates waiting for a priest to open them. His brother, Sigismund I, asked the pope to canonize him. He was canonized in 1522, and is the patron saint of Poland and Lithuania. In 1948, Pope Pius XII named him the special patron of all youth.

(See the Note on the Just Ruler)



## **SAINTS PERPETUA and FELICITY: 7 March**

An ancient text, *The Passion of Saint Perpetua, Saint Felicity and their Companions* is said to preserve a factual account of their arrest and imprisonment, along with that of several catechumens. Scholars generally believe that most of the narrative was written by Perpetua. If this is true, it is important because Perpetua is one of the first Christian female writers before the fourth century whose works have survived. The personal account of a female martyr is also rare, as the stories of other female martyrs were recorded collectively. Perpetua's style is described as personal, emotional, fragmented and colloquial – all understandable, given the circumstances.

The persecution of 202-203 was the first deliberate attempt to suppress Christianity in the Roman Empire. The martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity may have occurred in the aftermath of Emperor Septimus Severus' decrees of 202 that forbade conversion to Judaism or Christianity. Enforcement of anti-Christian measures in his time was sporadic and seemed mainly aimed at preventing new conversions.

Perpetua, like Felicity a native of Carthage, and born around 181, was a married woman with an infant boy. She had two brothers, one of them a catechumen. She opened her account with conflict between her and her father, a pagan, who wished her to deny the faith to save her life. She refused, and was baptized before being

moved to prison, where, for a time, she and her companions were put in stocks. After guards were bribed, she was moved to a better part of the prison, where she nursed her child before giving its care to her mother and brother. Her father visited her in prison several times and pleaded with her, but she remained steadfast. She was brought to a hearing before Hilarian, the Roman Procurator of North Africa, and there she and her companions confessed their Christian faith. Her father appealed to her once again, but, on Hadrian's orders, was beaten in to silence. The group was condemned to the animals in the amphitheatre.

Felicity was a slave, possibly Perpetua's. At the time of her arrest she was pregnant, but the law forbade the execution of a pregnant woman. She gave birth to a girl in prison, and that opened the way for her execution. She gave the child into the care of a sister. When she had cried out with the pains of child-birth, some prison guards jeered at her, saying that, if she found child-birth painful, how was she going to face the beasts?

Games were due to be held in honour of the official birthday of Geta, the younger brother of Emperor Caracalla. On the day, the prisoners were led into the amphitheatre in Carthage. The *Passion* states that 'they went to the amphitheatre as if it were to heaven, and, if they trembled, it was with joy, not fear.' At the demand of the crowd, they were first scourged; then a boar, a bear, and a leopard were set on the men, and a wild cow on the two women, who stood together, side by side. Saturus, one of the men, was savaged by a leopard;

seeing him drenched in blood, the crowd chanted, ‘Well washed, well washed.’ The martyrs said goodbye to each other before being attacked and wounded by the animals, and then had their throats cut by the sword. They died on 7 March 203.

Martyrdom was intended to combine public degradation, physical punishment, and a reminder of the extent of imperial power. In the context of the times, its cruelty was not exceptional. Ultimately, martyrdom expressed loyalty to God as the supreme value. In the story of Perpetua and Felicity, martyrdom became a means of self-empowerment for women in Christian circles, a statement that a woman is more than a wife and mother.

In the story, their Christian faith motivated the martyrs to acknowledge a higher authority than that of family or empire. Perpetua’s relationship with her father is the most prominently featured of her family ties, and she interacts with him four times. She may have considered this relationship to be her most important, given what is known about its importance within Roman society. Fathers expected their daughters to honour them, care for them, and enhance their reputation through marriage. In becoming a martyr, Perpetua failed to conform to society’s expectations. Furthermore, she and Felicity remain loyal to Christ even though this meant leaving young children behind at the time of their death.

Although the narrative describes Perpetua as “honourably married,” no mention is made of her

husband. We do not know the reason for this, but it may simply be that he had died.

Perpetua belonged to an aristocratic family with Roman citizenship, as indicated by her name Vibius Perpetua. Her execution alongside slaves demonstrated Christianity's ability to transcend social distinctions, in contrast to the inequality that pervaded Roman society and religion. As Perpetua and Felicity were equal in martyrdom despite differences in social class, they made a powerful statement that Christianity transcends social structure.

In Carthage, a basilica was afterwards erected over the tomb of the martyrs, where an inscription bearing their names has been found. They are two of seven women commemorated by name in the Roman canon of the Mass.

*The Passion of Saints Perpetua, Felicity and their Companions*, translated by Walter Shewring is available in *Saints are not Sad: Forty Biographical Portraits*, assembled by F. J. Sheed, Sheed & Ward, London, 1949, pp.7-18.

## **SAINT JOHN of GOD: 8 March**

John (João) Cidade was born in the village of Montemor O Novo, near Lisbon, Portugal, in 1495, into a once-prominent family, possibly of Jewish origin, that became impoverished, but had strong religious faith. His mother died when he was young, and his father joined a monastery. As a young man, John worked as a shepherd for a farmer, who was pleased with his strength and good work. The farmer offered him his daughter in marriage. This would have made John heir to the estate, but he refused, preferring to try adventure abroad.

He moved to Spain, where, at the age of twenty-eight, he joined the army of Emperor Charles V, and fought in a few battles, including the defeat of the Turkish attack on Vienna in 1532. The intervals between battles he spent in drinking, stealing and living off the countryside. He was dismissed from the army in disgrace when some captured booty he had been appointed to guard went missing.

John went to Ceuta, then a Portuguese colony in North Africa. There, for three years, he supported a Portuguese family of six from the minor nobility who had been impoverished when they fell into disfavour with the king. When they received a pardon, he returned to Spain.

After many exploits, he worked selling religious books, including the Bible, which had become more

readily available through the recent invention by Johannes Gutenberg of the moveable type printing press.

On the feast of Saint Sebastian, while listening to a sermon by Blessed John of Ávila, who was known as the Apostle of Andalusia, he experienced what seems to have been a mental break-down. It appears to have been brought on by the feeling that his life up till then had been useless, if not evil. He was committed to an asylum for the insane, the Royal Hospital in Granada, a place of ignorance, filth and cruelty. But, after a visit from John of Ávila, he recovered. Believing that the poor and needy deserved better treatment than he had received, he decided, at the age of forty-four, to spend the rest of his life caring for the sick and the poor, despite having neither training nor money.

He went to John of Ávila for help. John helped him to set aside his anxieties about his past and look instead to the future. So John Cidade settled in Granada, and spent his energy caring for the neediest people of the city. Slowly he drew to himself a circle of helpers who joined him in this service. People saw the good work that was being done and supported it. His hospital for the mentally ill provided clean surroundings, good food and heat. More importantly, there was respect and listening. Later he added a hostel for the homeless, travellers and pilgrims. He also reached beyond the walls of these institutions to care for widows, the elderly, prostitutes and the poor in their homes.

John encountered criticism for not distinguishing between the “deserving” and the “undeserving” poor. In reply he quoted the Gospel that God causes the sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and the rain to fall on just and unjust alike (Matthew 5.45), so it was not for him, John, to make a judgment.

One day, when he was in Granada, the Royal Hospital, his former place of torment, went on fire. The staff abandoned it, but John went into the burning building and organized the patients into rescue parties to hold each other by the hand as he led them to safety.

His first two co-workers were Peter Velasco, a murderer, and Anthony Martín, the murder victim’s brother, who had planned on killing Peter in revenge. John brought the two to reconciliation and they joined him and others in the work. They had no vows, and their “habit” was a trousers and jacket.

After his death, his group developed into a religious order which came to be called the Hospitallers of Saint John of God. The latter name was given to him by the Bishop of Tuy as a mark of respect for him and his work.

Early in 1550, John jumped into a flooded river to try and rescue a drowning boy. He failed, and caught what may have been pneumonia. He died on 8 March 1550, his fifty-fifth birthday. He was canonized in 1690, and in 1886 was named patron of hospitals, the sick and nurses, as well as fire-fighters, alcoholics, and booksellers.

## **SAINT FRANCES of ROME: 9 March**

Frances was born in 1384 in Rome to wealthy, aristocratic parents. When she was eleven years old, she wanted to become a nun, but, at about the age of twelve, her parents forced her to marry a man from a wealthy family, Lorenzo Ponziano, the commander of papal troops in Rome.

Frances and Lorenzo lost the younger two of their three children to plague, but the effect of this seems to have been to sensitize them to the needs of the poor. The city of Rome was then largely in ruins, with wolves seen on the streets. During the wars between the pope in Rome and various anti-popes in the Great Western Schism, Lorenzo served the former. However, in his absence during a period of exile, much of his property was destroyed. In the course of an occupation of Rome by Neapolitan forces, he was wounded so severely that he never fully recovered. Frances nursed him, but he died in 1436. Although their marriage had been arranged, she and Lorenzo were happy in their forty years together.

According to one story, their son, Battista, was to be delivered as a hostage to the commander of the Neapolitan troops. Obeying this order, Frances brought him to the appointed site. But on the way she stopped at a church and entrusted his life to Our Lady. When the soldiers went to put her son on a horse to bring him off to captivity, it refused to move, despite heavy whipping.



The soldiers saw the hand of God in this, and returned the boy to his mother.

Frances was not oblivious to the chaos which ruled in Rome in that period of neglect by the pope, and ongoing warfare between him and the various forces competing for power on the Italian peninsula. With her sister as a companion, Frances prayed, visited the poor, and took care of the sick, inspiring other women of the city to do the same. She turned part of the family's country estate into a hospital.

In 1425, she founded a society, neither cloistered nor bound by formal vows, called the Oblates Regular of Saint Benedict (or of Mary), which followed her life of combining prayer and meeting the needs of society. She said, 'It is most laudable in a married woman to be devout, but she must never forget that she is a housewife, and sometimes she must leave God at the altar to find him in her house-keeping.'

Frances died on 9 March 1440, and was canonized in 1608.

## SAINT PATRICK: 17 March

Saint Patrick was born about 385 at a place called Banaven Taberniae (or maybe Banaventa Berniae.) No one knows where this was; it may have been anywhere on the west coast of Britain from Hadrian's Wall to Cornwall. (Recent studies have suggested that it may have been in Brittany, France.) He was born into a Roman family: his mother was Concessa; his father, Calpornius, was a Roman official and a deacon in the church, and his grand-father, Potitus, a priest. In those days it was normal for priests to marry.

The reliable sources of information we have about Patrick's life are the *Letter to Coroticus* and the *Confessions*. These are generally accepted as authentic; other sources are legendary.

Patrick was not a model Christian child. Writing at a later date about his childhood, he said, 'I did not believe in God', and, about his friends and himself, he said, 'We had turned away from God; we neither kept his commandments, nor obeyed our pastors who used to warn us about our salvation.'

At about the age of sixteen, he was captured by Irish slave-raiders, along with, he says, thousands of others, and brought to Ireland. He was put to work at the forest of Foclut, probably near Killala in County Mayo, on the shores of 'the Western Sea beyond which there is nothing.' Over a period of six years, he was reduced to a

wretched state by hunger and poor clothing, but he used to pray and fast, day and night, on the hill-side. He said, 'Even in times of frost or snow, I would rise before dawn to pray.'

In his sleep, he heard a voice say to him, 'Soon you will go to your own country.' He made his escape and travelled some two hundred miles. He was given hospitality by the Decies, a people near Ardmore in West Waterford, among whom there were Christian communities, perhaps made up of slaves taken from Roman Britain in sufficient numbers for their home churches to ask the pope for a bishop - Palladius - for them.

After some time, he found a boat that he hoped would take him home. At first, he was refused a passage because he was a Christian, but later the sailors relented and took him. During a voyage that lasted three days, followed by a walk with the boatmen for twenty-eight days, they ran out of food. He urged them to conversion and to trust in God. Food came. Many years later he was captured for the second time, but escaped after two months. He finally reached home to be welcomed by relatives who had probably lost hope for him.

One night, in a dream, he saw a man called Victor carrying letters, one of which was called 'The Voice of the Irish.' Victor said to him, 'We ask you, young man, to come and walk with us once more. He who has given his life for you, he it is who speaks to you.' Despite being summoned back to the place of his enslavement,

Patrick says, 'I woke full of joy.' He began to train for the priesthood in Gaul (France), perhaps under Saint Germanus of Auxerre. He became a deacon, then a priest, and later a bishop. He was given a mission by Pope Saint Celestine I. He followed Palladius, a bishop sent in 431, who had died after an unsuccessful mission to the Irish 'believing in Christ'. Patrick arrived in 432, perhaps on the shores of Strangford Lough.

Legends written centuries later state that, not long after landing, he lit a fire on the hill of Slane in County Meath. This was in contradiction to the order of the high king, Laoghaire, who lived on the nearby hill of Tara, and who, following custom, had instructed that no fire should be lit until he, the king, had lit the *Fire of Baal - Beal Tine*. Patrick was called to account for his actions, and it was said that it was while going there that he and his followers chanted the prayer which became known as *The Breastplate of Saint Patrick*. This meeting became the opportunity he had sought of meeting the king and telling him about the Christian faith.

Most of his work is said by legend to have been near Armagh, which became his headquarters, and especially in Saul, near Down Patrick in County Down, where he celebrated his first Eucharist in Ireland, and where he began and ended his missionary life. A local chief called Dichu gave him a building there.

Patrick adopted and adapted local traditions. As a basic plan of action, he set out to convert the chiefs, knowing that their people would likely follow them. He had no

illusions about the kind of people he was working among, and he didn't hesitate to spell it out in blunt language. He called them, heathens, dogs, sorcerers, murderers, liars and perjurers. Once he was jailed for fourteen days. He wrote, 'God rescued me twelve times when my life was in danger. I daily expected to be robbed or murdered or reduced to slavery in one way or another. I endured many persecutions, even to the extent of chains. I gave up my free-born status for the good of others.' In all of this, however, he identified with the people, speaking of 'We Irish.'

(Patrick did not drive snakes out of Ireland. They were never there in the first place; the last ice age saw to that. A Norman Cistercian called Jocelin, who lived in England about seven or eight centuries after Patrick, may have been the source of this story. Nor did Patrick try to explain the Trinity by reference to the shamrock; that notion was first heard of in 1727. Had he tried to do so, he would just have confused the teaching. And it's very unlikely that he wore a mitre; they were not used in Ireland for another five hundred years. And his "crozier" was probably nothing more than a walking staff.)

Patrick felt lonely, and it weighed heavily on him: 'How I would dearly love to be going to homeland or relatives, and also to Gaul in order to visit the brothers and to meet the Christian community. God knows how I longed for it; but I am tied by the Spirit.'

A sense of his calling kept him in Ireland: 'My only prayer to God is that it may never happen that I should

leave his people which he won for himself at the end of the earth. I ask God for perseverance, to grant that I may remain a faithful witness to him for his sake until my passing from this life.’

At times, setbacks were severe. Some of his converts in Britain were killed by a chief called Coroticus. Patrick sent messengers to him calling on him to repent, but Coroticus insulted them. So Patrick wrote him a letter, the second of his writings to have come down to us. In it he expresses his anguish at the killings: ‘The newly baptized in their white garments had just been anointed with chrism. It was still giving forth its scent when they were cruelly and brutally murdered.’ The men were killed, and the women sold into a brothel or to slavery. Patrick said of the soldiers of Coroticus that ‘They make their living on plunder; they fill their houses with the goods of dead Christians.’ His letter condemned Coroticus, threatening him with hell, and calling on Christians to isolate him, giving him neither food nor drink until he came to repentance.

Patrick’s difficulties came also from his fellow clergy in Britain. He wrote, ‘They think it a disgrace that we are Irish’, and they despised him for his lack of education, which he admitted freely. He had studied little before his capture, and not at all during it. He opened his spiritual autobiography, *The Confession*, with the words, ‘I Patrick, a sinner, the most unlearned of men, the lowliest of all the faithful, am utterly worthless in the eyes of many.’ He said he was not good either at theology or the Irish language, though he may have understated his

ability, because a study of his writings shows many references, both direct and indirect, to the Bible. He described himself as ‘unskilled in every way, an unlettered exile.’ His colleagues also belittled his ignorance of law, literature and current affairs.

They questioned his mission, saying, ‘Why does he throw himself into danger among enemies who have no knowledge of God?’ But Patrick saw it differently, ‘I myself failed to realize in good time the grace that was then in me. It is obvious to me now that I should have seen it earlier,’ and ‘Let anyone laugh and revile me who wants to. I will not keep silence, nor will I conceal the signs and wonders which have been shown me by the Lord.’

They also questioned his morals, and in the most shameful way imaginable. Thirty years after the event, a close friend, a deacon to whom he had confided himself, revealed in public a confession which Patrick had made to him about something he had done as a boy of perhaps fifteen, before he came to faith. ‘To him I had confided my very soul,’ wrote Patrick, deeply hurt, especially as he had been tried in his absence. It is not known what this sin was. Some scholars think it may be that he ate food that had been offered to a pagan deity, thereby implicating himself in pagan worship. ‘On that day,’ he wrote, ‘the impulse to fall away was overpowering, not only here and now but forever.’ He did not respond to the summons to go to Britain to be judged by his fellow bishops. It was probably during this period that he went

to Croagh Patrick to spend forty days in prayer, and also that he wrote *The Confession* as an apologia.

But he was not abandoned. In a vision he saw a document with the charges against him listed on it. God said to him, 'I have seen with disapproval the face of the chosen one deprived of his good name.' Patrick was encouraged: 'I now felt a great strength in me, and my confidence in myself was vindicated before God and man. I say openly that my conscience is clear and God is my witness that I have told no lies in my account to you.'

Despite these setbacks, Patrick had his moments of success. 'I am very much in debt to God, who gave me so much grace, that through me many people were born again in God and afterwards confirmed, and that clergy were ordained for them everywhere. All this was for a people newly come to belief, whom the Lord took from the very ends of the earth.' He was able to feel that his efforts had met with success, writing, 'How, then, does it happen that, in Ireland, a people who, in their ignorance of God always worshipped idols and unclean things in the past, have now become a people of the Lord, and are called children of God? How is it that sons and daughters of Irish chiefs are seen to be monks and virgins dedicated to Christ? Indeed the number of virgins from our converts is beyond counting.'

He was proud of the courage of his converts: 'Of them all, the women who live in slavery suffer the most. They have to endure terror and threats all the time. But the



Lord gives grace to many of his servants and, although forbidden to do so, they follow him courageously.’

Towards the end of his life he expressed his determination to continue, ‘I have kept faith with the heathens among whom I live, and I do not intend to let them down now. Although I am unskilled in every way, I see that, even in this world, I have been exalted beyond measure by the Lord.’

Patrick died at Saul in 461 and was buried nearby at Down Patrick in County Down. His feast is celebrated each year on 17 March.

The following prayer is known as the *Breastplate* (or *Lorica*, or *The Deer’s Cry*) of Saint Patrick: -

I bind unto myself today the power of God to hold and lead,

His eye to watch, his might to stay, his ear to listen to my need,

the wisdom of my God to teach, his hand to guide, his shield to ward,

the word of God to give me speech, his heavenly host to be my guard.

Christ be with me, Christ 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 in quiet, Christ in danger,

Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

## **SAINT CYRIL of JERUSALEM: 18 March**

Cyril is believed to have been born and reared in Caesarea in Palestine, perhaps about 315. It is thought that his family was Christian. Little is known of his life before he became a priest. He was ordained deacon by Saint Macarius of Jerusalem about 335, and priest some eight years later by Saint Maximus. About the end of 350, he succeeded Maximus as bishop of Jerusalem.

His was a time of theological controversy, especially about the person of Jesus, his divinity and humanity, his relationship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. These controversies were often marked by egotism, struggles for position and influence, and sometimes even by violence. A council held in 358 under Bishop Acacius, his former mentor, who seemed to be jealous of Cyril, deposed him and forced him to retire to Tarsus. He was charged with selling church property. This was in fact true, but Cyril insisted he had done it to help the poor. A year later, another council attended by Cyril deposed Acacius. The following year, this was reversed and Cyril was exiled again. In 361, Emperor Julian allowed him to return to his diocese, but he was banished again in 367 by Emperor Valens for appointing a nephew of his as bishop of his home town of Caesarea. This was only one of several appointments of relatives he had made. This exile lasted until 375, when he was again reinstated. For his part, Cyril was not persuaded by the doctrine that Jesus Christ and the Father are *consubstantial*. His orthodoxy was examined by Saint

Gregory of Nyssa in 379 on the instructions of a regional council in Antioch, but he was vindicated. At the first Council of Constantinople in 381, he voted for acceptance of the term, having been finally persuaded that there wasn't a better alternative. He remained in his diocese in peace until he died on 18 March 387.

Saint Jerome said that 'Cyril was an out and out Arian [Arians did not accept the divinity of Jesus], was offered the see [of Jerusalem] on Maximus' death on condition that he would repudiate his ordination at the hands of that bishop.' (E. Yarnold, "*Cyril of Jerusalem*" in *The Early Church Fathers*, Routledge, London, 2000, p.4) Jerome claimed not only that Cyril was an Arian but also involved in the death of Maximus whom he replaced as bishop. Most scholars disagree with this and say that Jerome had a tendency to make statements which were more entertaining than factual. But throughout his life charges of Arianism were levelled against Cyril, and at least one Arian bishop saw him as an ally.

Cyril was known for charitable work in Jerusalem. For example, in the mid-fourth century, the city was hit by food shortages. It is said that 'Cyril secretly sold sacramental ornaments of the church and a valuable holy robe, fashioned with gold thread, that Emperor Constantine had once donated for the bishop to wear when he performed the rite of baptism.' (J.W. Drijvers, *Cyril of Jerusalem: bishop and city. Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae*, v.72, Leiden, Holland, 2004, p.65) Besides charitable works and pastoral responsibilities, Cyril had civic duties: these included the administration

of justice in his own court, the negotiation of ransom for captures, and some political roles. While he was in Jerusalem, bishops were given increased civic power: Emperor Constantius placed them on the same level as the civic elites. They were seen by some as a force for stability at a time when political leadership changed frequently.

Cyril's theology was in keeping with the doctrines laid down by the Council of Nicea, even if he had reservations about some of its terminology; he was in harmony with the other Eastern Fathers. His writings teach of the loving and forgiving nature of God which was not so common during his time. He wrote, 'The Spirit comes gently and makes himself known by his fragrance. He is not felt as a burden, for God is light,... The Spirit comes with the tenderness of a true friend to save, to heal, to teach, to counsel, to strengthen and to console.' In his own life, Cyril followed Christ's message of forgiveness: despite being exiled many times, he never showed ill will to those responsible.

He wrote twenty-three catechetical lectures while still a presbyter. These contain instructions on basic themes of Christian faith and practice. They are written in a popular style, full of pastoral love and care for the catechumens to whom they were delivered. An example of this is his saying that, 'If the incarnation [of Jesus] was a figment then so was our salvation.' They were intended to help prepare candidates for baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist. He said to catechumens, 'Die to your sins and live to righteousness from this very

day.’ (*Protocatechesis*, 5) Each lecture is based on a text of Scripture, and there are many scriptural quotations throughout. His thirteenth catechesis offers a reflection on the passion of Jesus which is warm without being sentimental, and instructive without being didactic. Together with an exposition of the Creed he wrote vigorous polemics against pagans, Jews and heretics. Of the Creed, he wrote,

This synthesis of faith was not made to accord with human opinions, but rather what was of greatest importance was gathered from all the Scriptures, to present the one teaching of the faith in its entirety.... this summary of faith encompassed in a few words the whole knowledge of the true religion contained in the Old and New Testaments. (*Catech. Illum.*, 5.12; PG 33.521-524)

His writings are of value today for the light they throw on the controversies of the time, the methods of instruction used, and the liturgical practices of the period, of which they give the fullest account extant. Cyril won wide admiration for his teaching.

Cyril is highly respected in the Palestinian Christian community. In 1883, he was declared a Doctor of the Church.

The following are extracts from his writings: -

‘The soul has free will: and though the devil can tempt the soul he has not the power to compel it against its

will. He suggests to you the idea of fornication; the acceptance or rejection of the suggestion depends on your decision.’

‘We pray [in the Eucharist] for those who have died, believing that it will be the greatest advantage for the souls of those for whom this supplication is offered when the holy and wonderful sacrifice is set before God.’

‘When you approach the Eucharist, make your left hand, as it were, a throne for your right, since it is about to receive a King; and hollow your palm, and receive the body of Christ, adding your “Amen.” Then, after you have carefully hallowed your eyes by the touch of the holy body, partake of it.’

‘The teaching of blessed Paul is, in itself, sufficient to give you complete assurance about the divine mysteries, the admission to which makes us “of the same body” and blood with Christ. For he proclaimed, with emphasis and precision that “our Lord Jesus Christ took bread and said: 'This is my body;' and, taking the cup, he gave thanks, and said, 'This is my blood'.” Since Christ himself in his own words asserted of the bread, 'This is my body', who will dare any longer to have doubts? And since in his own words he insisted, 'This is my blood', who will have any doubts or say that it is not his blood?

## **SAINT JOSEPH: 19 March**

The first mention of Joseph is in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Mark, usually considered the earliest Gospel, makes no mention of him. The letters of Paul, some of which may be earlier still, similarly omit him; but this is not surprising, as their subject matter is different from that of the Gospels.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke each give a genealogy of Jesus. (Matthew 1.1-17; Luke 3.23-28) They differ substantially: for example, Matthew gives the name of Joseph's father as Jacob, while Luke gives it as Heli. It may be that Matthew's genealogy traces Jesus' legal descent through Joseph, while Luke's traces his physical descent through Mary. They also give us differing narratives of the infancy of Jesus: for example, Matthew has the family settle in Nazareth after the return from Egypt (2.23), while Luke (1.26-27) has Mary and Joseph living there before Jesus' birth. Matthew alone describes the massacre of the infant boys of Bethlehem by Herod, and the flight into Egypt by Mary and Joseph.

Joseph is not mentioned again by name in the Gospels, although the accounts of Jesus' circumcision (Luke 2.21) and his being presented in the temple as an infant (Luke 2.22) refer to "they," which, in the context, must mean Joseph and Mary. Jesus' later loss in the temple in Jerusalem at the age of twelve refers to "his parents" (Luke 2.41), and to "your father and I" (2.48). Again, Joseph is clearly implied. The Gospels record nothing of

what he may have said: but he is presented as a strong, silent man of faith.

Joseph is described in the gospels as a *tekton* (Matthew 13.55), a word which has been translated as *carpenter*, though it could also mean a worker in stone, metal or construction. It is very likely that he passed his trade on to Jesus. (Mark 6.3) The Gospels give little other information about him, and he is never quoted. Christian tradition represents Mary as a widow during Jesus' adult ministry. In art, he is often depicted as elderly. There is no evidence for this; it seems to have been a convention adopted to reinforce teaching about the perpetual virginity of Mary.

Matthew records four dreams of Joseph's. In the first, an angel says to him, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' (1.20-21) 'When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had a son; and he named him Jesus.' (1.24-25)

In the second, 'an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother



by night, and went to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod.’ (2.13-15)

In the third, ‘an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.’ (2.19-21)

Fourthly, ‘when he [Joseph] heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazarene.”’ (2.22-23)

Certain features of the dream passages may be identified: -

There is clear emphasis on the obedience of Joseph to the messages received in his dreams. In contrast to Zechariah (Luke 1.18-20), Joseph in each case accepts what he is told by God through the angel.

The entire story is written to create “fulfilment” of Old Testament prophecies: Matthew 1.23; 2.6; 2.15; 2.17; 2.23. This is a constant theme of Matthew’s Gospel.

This Joseph parallels the Joseph of Genesis, in that dreams are of great significance in his life (Genesis 37.5-11, 19; 40.5-23). In each case, they find safety

in Egypt from difficulties at home (Genesis 37). One scripture scholar describes the story of Joseph of Genesis as ‘mostly a creation of edifying fiction.’ (John L. McKenzie)

The Gospels are silent about Joseph after the finding of Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem when he was twelve. (Luke 2.41-52) In Mark 6.3, Jesus is spoken of by people in the synagogue in Nazareth as ‘Mary’s son,’ with no reference to Joseph. Nothing is known of his death. There may, or may not, be significance in Matthew’s statement that Jesus ‘left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum’ (4.13; see also 9.1), and began his ministry there. (Luke 4.31) Does this suggest that Joseph was dead by then, or does it simply mean that Jesus, like any other man, left home to branch out on his own? It is not possible to be certain. If Joseph had been present at the death of Jesus, he would, under Jewish custom, have been expected to take charge of his body, but this role was performed instead by Joseph of Arimathea. Nor is it likely that Jesus would have entrusted his mother to John’s care had Joseph been still alive.

Joseph, ‘a righteous man’ (Matthew 1.19), was declared patron and protector of the church by Pope Pius IX in 1870. In 1955, in response to the challenge of Communism, Pope Pius XII declared him patron of workers and appointed a liturgical celebration of Saint Joseph the Worker on 1 May, or May Day, to counteract the traditional Communist rallying day. He is also venerated in the feast of the Holy Family [of Jesus, Mary and Joseph], on the first Sunday after Christmas.

According to the US National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, the Spanish form of his name, *San José*, is the world's most common place-name.

The Eastern Orthodox Church holds that Joseph was first married to a woman called Salome, who then died, that he was a widower when he was betrothed to Mary, and that references to Jesus' "brothers" (Matthew 12.46; 13.55-56; Mark 3.31-35; 6.3; Luke 8.19-21; Acts 1.14; 1 Corinthians 9.5) are to children of Joseph and Salome. The position of the Catholic Church, derived from the writings of Saint Jerome, is that Jesus' "brothers" should be understood to mean cousins or step-brothers. In both churches, the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary means that Joseph and Mary never had sexual relations. Pope John Paul II wrote, 'Joseph is the father: his fatherhood is not one that derives from begetting offspring; but neither is it an "apparent" or merely "substitute" fatherhood. Rather, it is one that fully shares in authentic human fatherhood and the mission of a father in the family.' (Encyclical *Redemptoris Custos* [Guardian of the Redeemer], On the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph in the Life of Christ and of the Church, 15 August 1989, n. 21)

In short, Joseph was a man of honour – a just man – a man of strong, silent faith, who did what the Lord told him to do, and, by doing so, played his part in the redemption of humanity.

Joseph

'I am Joseph the carpenter,  
of David's kingly line.  
I wanted an heir,  
discovered my wife's son wasn't mine.

I am an obstinate lover,  
I love Mary for better or worse.  
I wouldn't stop loving,  
when I found Another came first.

Mine was the likeness I hoped for,  
when the first-born man-child came.  
But nothing of him was me,  
I couldn't even choose his name.

I am Joseph who wanted  
to teach my son how to live.  
My lesson for my foster-son:  
Endure. Love. Give.'  
(U. A. Fanthorpe)

Here is a reflection on work from Christian sources.  
Work is: -

- human participation in God's work of creation and conservation, a response to God's invitation to heal, restore and build up an imperfect and flawed world;
- a form of service to one's fellow human beings in solidarity with them;
- promotes the common good of society;
- a way of discovering and developing oneself, of learning how to associate with others and to come to discover them also;
- promotes self-esteem and self-expression; it gives a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment;
- is a grace, a gift. God gave the command to work before the Fall: Genesis 1.28; 2.15.

As Daniel O'Leary said, 'Work has a divine dignity about it. It is love made visible.'

## **SAINT TURIBIUS of MONGROVEJO: 23 March**

Turibius Alphonsus de Mongrovejo (or Mogrovejo) was born near Valladolid, Spain, in November 1538, of a noble family. He was named after another Spanish saint, Turibius of Astorga. He was educated at Coimbra in Portugal and Salamanca in Spain, and became a professor of law at the highly reputed University of Salamanca. He received an appointment from King Philip II as Inquisitor of Granada. In this position, he earned a reputation for fairness and moderation.

While still a layman, the king appointed him archbishop of Lima in 1579. The following year he received minor orders, was ordained priest and then bishop. He arrived in Paita, Peru, about 1,000 km from Lima, in 1581. He began his missionary life by walking to Lima, teaching and baptizing people on the way. He used to say, 'Time is not our own; we must give a strict account of it.' Three times he traversed the 450,000 square km. of his diocese, generally on foot, frequently alone and defenceless. He was exposed to storms, floods, deserts, wild animals, tropical heat, fevers and sometimes threats from hostile people. He baptized and confirmed nearly half a million people, among them Saints Rose of Lima and Martin de Porres.

He built roads, schools, chapels, hospitals and convents, and, at Lima, in 1591, he founded the first seminary in the western hemisphere. In 1604, he began construction of a new cathedral in Lima. He produced a

summary of Christian doctrine which subsequently became known as the *Catechism of Saint Turibius*.

Turibius convened thirteen diocesan synods and three provincial councils, which undertook needed reforms in the church, especially among the clergy, who were decadent. These served as a model for others, and were adopted elsewhere in Latin America. He was a champion of the rights of the indigenous peoples against their Spanish masters. Elizabeth Hallam has written,

There was great opposition to Turibius from the governors of Peru whose authority he challenged. He learned local languages so that he could communicate with - and convert - the people, and he was a strong and effective champion of their rights. (Elizabeth Hallam (ed.), *Saints: Who They Are and How They Help You*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1994, p.27)

It is said that, years before he died, Turibius predicted the day and hour of his death. At Pacasmayo he contracted fever, but continued working to the end, arriving at a town called Sana in a dying condition. Making his way to the sanctuary of the church, he received Viaticum, and died shortly after on 23 March 1606. He was canonized in 1726.

## **SAINT FRANCIS of PAOLA: 2 April**

Francis' parents had been childless for some years after their marriage, so they prayed to Saint Francis of Assisi. They then had three children, the eldest of whom they named Francis. He was born in Paola, Calabria, Italy, on 27 March 1416, and was educated by Franciscans.

When still an infant, he suffered from a swelling which endangered the sight of one of his eyes. His parents again prayed to Saint Francis of Assisi and promised that their son, if healed, would pass a year wearing the "little habit" of Saint Francis in one of the friaries of his order - a not uncommon practice at the time. Tradition has it that Francis was immediately cured.

From his early years, Francis showed signs of holiness. When he reached the age of thirteen, he entered a Franciscan friary in fulfilment of the vow made by his parents. He impressed the friars by his love of prayer and penance, his humility and obedience. When the year was over, he went with his parents on a pilgrimage to Assisi, Rome, and other places of devotion. Returning home, he found a secluded cave on his father's farm and lived there in solitude; but, later on, found an even more secluded cave on the coast. There he remained alone for about six years, living in prayer and penance. The Passion of Jesus Christ, the Eucharist and Our Lady were the pillars of his devotional life.



Fantastic stories began to circulate about him. According to one, in 1464, while trying to cross the Straits of Messina to Sicily, he was refused passage by a boatman. He reportedly laid his cloak on the water, tied one end of it to his walking staff, which served as a mast, and sail-boarded across the strait, while his would-be travelling companions followed well behind in the boat!

In 1435, two companions joined him in his retreat. To accommodate them, Francis built three cells and a chapel. The number of his disciples gradually increased, and, about 1454, he built a monastery and church. Its construction was the occasion of a great outburst of enthusiasm and devotion on the part of the people; even the nobility carried stones and joined in the work. Their devotion was increased by the many miracles which Francis wrought in answer to their prayers.

The rule of life adopted by him and his followers was one of extraordinary severity. They observed Lenten fast and abstinence all year round and lived in great poverty. But their distinguishing mark was humility: they were to live unknown and hidden from the world. Like the Poor Man of Assisi, Francis of Paola was never ordained. His movement became known as the Hermits of Saint Francis of Assisi, later renamed the Minim friars – in contrast to the Franciscans, who were only Minor! Their name refers to their role as the "least of all the faithful." Their rule of life was approved by Pope Alexander VI. Following the example of Francis of Assisi, Francis also founded an order of nuns and a Third Order for people

living in the world. The most noted member of this Order was Saint Francis de Sales.

Francis became famous for miracles and was also renowned as a prophet: he foretold the capture of Otranto by the Ottoman Turks in 1480 and its subsequent recovery by the kingdom of Naples. He was no respecter of persons, whatever their rank or position. He rebuked the King of Naples for his wrong-doing, and, in consequence, suffered persecution. When King Louis XI of France was dying, he asked Francis to visit him. Francis refused until the pope ordered him to go. He then went to the king, and was with him at his death. Louis' successor, Charles VIII, was an admirer of Francis' and kept him near the court to consult him. He built monasteries for the Minims in France and in Rome. Louis XII, who succeeded Charles, also held Francis in high esteem.

Francis wanted to return to Italy, but the king would not let him go because he valued his counsel. The last three months of Francis' life was spent in solitude in France, preparing for death. On Holy Thursday, 1507, he gathered his community around him and exhorted them to live in charity, to maintain the rigour of their life, and in particular perpetual abstinence from meat. The next day, Good Friday, he again called them together, gave them his last instructions, and appointed a successor. He then received the last rites and asked to have the Passion according to Saint John read to him. While it was being read, he died, on 2 April 1507, in Tours, France. He was ninety-one.

Francis was a vegan, abstaining not only from meat, but from all animal-based foods, such as fish, eggs, and dairy products. There are several stories about his compassion for animals, and how he gave life back to animals that had been killed for food.

In 1562, a mob of Huguenots in France broke open his tomb and found his body incorrupt. They dragged it out, burned it, and scattered the bones, which were recovered by Catholic faithful and distributed to churches of his order. Francis was canonized in 1519; he is the patron saint of boatmen. The Minims have never been numerous, but, in 2010, they had forty-six communities in nine countries.

In one of his letters, Francis wrote,

Put aside hatred and animosity. Take pains to refrain from sharp words. If they escape your lips, do not be ashamed to let your lips produce the remedy, since they have caused the wounds. Pardon one another so that later on you will not remember the injury. The recollection of an injury is itself wrong. It adds to our anger, nurtures our sin, and hates what is good. It is a rusty arrow and poison for the soul. It puts all virtue to flight. It is like a worm in the mind: it confuses our speech and tears to shreds our petitions to God. It is foreign to charity: it remains planted in the soul like a nail. It is wickedness that never sleeps, sin that never fails. It is indeed a daily death.

## **SAINT ISIDORE of SEVILLE: 4 April**

Isidore was born, probably in Cartagena, Spain, about 560, to a family which had been instrumental in converting the Visigoth kings from Arianism to Catholicism. The church celebrates him and his siblings as saints: an elder brother, Leander, preceded him as bishop of Seville; a younger brother, Fulgentius, was bishop of Astigi; his sister, Florentina, served God as a nun, and, it is said, ruled several monasteries.

Isidore received his elementary education in the cathedral school of Seville, the first of its kind in Iberia. He studied the liberal arts, and acquired some knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. This was at a time when classical culture was disappearing, illiteracy was widespread and warfare almost endemic. It was a time, too, of cultural change from Roman to Visigoth influence, and a gradual recovery of Christianity from Arianism.

After his brother Leander's death about 600, Isidore succeeded him as bishop. It is not known if he ever became a monk, but he respected monastic life, and, on becoming bishop, declared himself protector of monks.

Isidore recognized that the spiritual and material welfare of the people depended on integrating Roman and non-Roman cultures. He worked with the Visigoth kings to forge the different peoples and cultures of their kingdom into a united nation comprising Iberia and

France. He raised standards of education, introducing the study of Aristotle to Iberia. In the Second Council of Seville in 619, attended by delegates from France as well as Iberia, he and his brother bishops enacted legislation to counteract Arianism, a teaching which downgraded the significance of Jesus Christ's divinity. He was influential in winning acceptance of the *Filioque* clause of the Nicene Creed, which affirms that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father *and from the Son* (Latin: *Filioque*).

At the Fourth National Council in Toledo in 633, over which he presided, bishops were directed to establish seminaries in their cathedral cities. Students were to study languages, literature, law, and medicine. The church bound itself in free allegiance to the king of the Visigoths, while saying nothing of allegiance to the bishop of Rome. Some scholars see these councils as early fore-runners of representative government: 'The case for representation as an intrinsic part of all good government was first elaborately stated in the conciliar theory of Church government.' (George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, New York, 1937, p.286)

To promote education, Isidore attempted an immensely ambitious project, a compendium of all human knowledge, the *Etymologiae*, later known as the *Origines*; it ran to twenty volumes. He used Latin with Visigoth influences. This encyclopaedia attempted to summarize all ancient and contemporary learning. It became famous throughout Europe and gave impetus to others in later centuries to attempt similar works. A

modern editor of his work said that, in it, 'all secular knowledge that was of use to the Christian scholar had been winnowed out and contained in one handy volume; the scholar need search no further.' (Katherine Nell McFarlane, "Isidore of Seville on the Pagan Gods, *Origines* VIII. 11", in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 1980, 70.3: p.4) It was printed in at least ten editions between 1470 and 1530, and remained popular until the Renaissance when other works superseded it. He also published at least nine other books. One of them, *On Ecclesiastical Offices*, is valuable as a source of information about the Mozarabic liturgy, which included Spanish and Moorish influences. Isidore became known as "The Schoolmaster of the Middle Ages."

One of his sayings was, 'The whole science of the saints consists in finding out and doing the will of God.' He also wrote,

Teaching that lacks grace may enter our ears but it never touches the heart. When the grace of God really touches our inmost mind so as to bring understanding, then the word that reaches our ears can also sink deeply into the heart.

His attitude towards Jews followed that of Saint Augustine. In his work, *On the Catholic Faith against the Jews*, he accepted the necessity of a Jewish presence in society because of their expected role in the anticipated Second Coming of Christ. But he was more polemical than others, regarding rabbis and Jews

generally as intellectually dishonest. He contributed two harsh decisions to the Council of Toledo in 633: canon 60 called for the forced removal of Jewish children from their parents and their education by Christians, while canon 65 forbade Jews, and Christians of Jewish origin, from holding public office.

He has been described as the last of the great Latin Church Fathers (though some give that title to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux). He exercised far-reaching influence on the educational life of the Middle Ages. His contemporaries saw him as a man raised up by God to save the Iberian peoples from a tidal wave of barbarism that threatened to inundate their civilization. The eighth Council of Toledo (653) described him as, ‘The extraordinary teacher, the most recent ornament of the Catholic church, the most learned man of recent times, always to be spoken of with reverence.’

Isidore died on 4 April 636, having served as bishop of Seville for over thirty years and being buried there. His tomb became a place of pilgrimage for Muslims as well as Christians during the period of *convivencia* (*living together* between Christians and Muslims) in Spain. During the re-conquest of Spain from the Arabs, his body was transferred to a new tomb in León by its king in the mid-eleventh century. Isidore was canonized in 1598 and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1722. In Dante's *Paradiso* (X.130), he is mentioned with the Scot Richard of Saint Victor and the Englishman Bede the Venerable. He has been declared patron of the internet and computer technicians and users.

In his lifetime, Isidore probably attended many meetings. He composed the following prayer to be said before one: -

We stand before you, Holy Spirit, conscious of our sinfulness, but aware that we gather in your name. Come to us, remain with us and enlighten our hearts. Give us light and strength to know your will, to make it our own, and to live it in our lives. Guide us by your wisdom, support us by your power, for you are God, sharing the glory of the Father and the Son. You desire justice for all; enable us to uphold the rights of others. Do not allow us to be misled by ignorance, or corrupted by fear or favour. Unite us to yourself in the bond of love and keep us faithful to all that is true. As we gather in your name, may we temper justice with love, so that all our decisions may be pleasing to you, and earn the reward promised to good and faithful servants. Amen.

Here is another of his prayers: -

Remember, Lord of what I am made; I am only human. Take pity on my weakness, support my frail nature. You know the temptations I suffer, how they surge within me, and the storms they raise in me. You know me well, Lord.

He also wrote: 'Every word we speak, every pulsation of our veins, is related by musical rhythms to the powers of harmony.' (*Etymologiae*)



## **SAINT VINCENT FERRER: 5 April**

Vincent was the fourth child of an Anglo-Scots nobleman, William Stewart Ferrer and his Spanish wife, Constantia Miguel. He was born on 23 January 1350, in Valencia, Spain. He began his classical studies at the age of eight, and his study of theology at fourteen. It is said that, even as a child, he would fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, help the poor and distribute alms to them. He had great devotion to the Passion of Christ.

At the age of eighteen, Vincent entered the Dominican Order. However, he had no sooner entered it than he was tempted to leave, and his parents encouraged him, hoping he would become a diocesan priest. Vincent prayed and practised penance to overcome these trials. He stayed, made his profession of vows, and continued with his studies. For a period of three years, he read solely Sacred Scripture, eventually committing much of it to memory. After his final profession of vows, he published a treatise in logic on dialectic suppositions, and, in 1379, after being held back for a year because of suspicions about his orthodoxy, was ordained priest. He was then sent to Barcelona where he gained a doctorate in theology.

Vincent later claimed that the Great Western Schism, with its rival claimants to the papacy, had such a depressing effect on his mind that it caused him to be seriously ill at the age of forty. He claimed that God healed him and instructed him to go out and convert

many. For twenty-one years he travelled with a team of preachers not only in Spain, but also to Ireland, England, Scotland, France, Switzerland, and Italy, preaching the Gospel and converting many.

He preached to Saint Colette of Corbie and to her nuns, and it is said she told him he would die in France. Too ill to return to Spain, he did, indeed, die in Brittany. Breton fishermen still invoke his aid in storms. In Spain, he is also the patron of orphanages.

Vincent took part in the famous, or perhaps infamous, *Disputation*, which took place in the town of Tortosa in 1413-14. It was organized by Benedict XIII, the anti-pope of Avignon, whom Vincent supported. The Jewish representatives were at a serious disadvantage, because when they tried to reply to Christian charges they were met with the threat of an accusation of blasphemy. The disputation took the form of an attack by the Christian side against Jews, including the use of intimidation and threats. Jews were not allowed to challenge what Christians said, and Christians were always allowed the last word. When the Jews asked for a free debate, they were told that they were not at a debate, but were there to be taught. After two weeks of discussion, some of it on the Sabbath, the head of the Christian side summed up, saying that the victory of the Christians was clear. Vincent has said, 'Whoever proudly disputes and contradicts will always stand outside the door. Christ, the master of humility, reveals his truth only to the humble, and hides himself from the proud.'

Benedict XIII announced the result as a victory, and gave instructions for all books of the Talmud to be handed over to his officials for censorship. This actually brought some relief to the Jews, because they had feared there would be a general burning of the Talmud.

Compulsory “conversions” of Jews continued. Vincent is said to have converted many Jews to Catholicism, but often, it seems, by dishonourable means. For instance, he is said to have made their lives difficult until they converted, and to have turned synagogues into churches on his own authority. His sermons, which Jews were obliged to attend, seem to have frequently incited anti-Semitic attacks. He promulgated laws banning Jews from trading food with Christians, having Christian employees, changing their residence, or cutting either their hair or beards. Fortunately, a new king of Aragon, Alfonso V, who came to the throne in 1416, annulled Vincent’s legislation against Jews, and introduced new laws protecting them. (The general pattern in Spain was that Jews were treated better, or at least less badly, by Muslim rulers than by Christian ones.)

Vincent was loyal to the anti-pope Clement VII and his successor, Benedict XIII of Avignon, believing them to be true popes. But after Benedict reneged on promises to try and reach a settlement with other claimants it appears that Vincent withdrew his support from him and urged King Ferdinand of Aragon and Castile to do the same.

Vincent died on 5 April 1419 in Brittany, France, and is buried there. He was canonized in 1455.

## **SAINT JEAN BAPTISTE de la SALLE: 7 April**

Born in Rheims, France, on 30 April 1651, into a wealthy, aristocratic family, Jean-Baptiste de la Salle was named a canon of Rheims Cathedral when he was fifteen. Though he had to assume the administration of family affairs after his parents died, he completed his theological studies and was ordained priest in 1678. Two years later he received a doctorate in theology.

He became involved in education little by little, without ever consciously setting out to do so. In 1679, what began as a charitable effort to help one individual, Adrian Nyel, to establish a school for the poor in Rheims gradually became his life's work. He thereby began a new religious institute, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, or de la Salle (of the classroom) Brothers, known in the United States as the Christian Brothers. (They are sometimes confused with a different congregation, also known as the Christian Brothers, founded in Ireland by Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice.)

In his own words, one decision led to another until he found himself doing something he had never anticipated. He wrote: -

I had imagined that the care which I assumed of the schools and the masters would amount only to a marginal involvement committing me to no more than providing for the subsistence of the masters, and ensuring that they acquitted themselves of

their tasks with piety and devotedness... Indeed, if I had ever thought that the care I was taking of the school-masters out of charity would ever have made it my duty to live with them, I would have dropped the whole project....God, who guides all things with wisdom and serenity, whose way it is not to force the inclinations of persons, willed to commit me entirely to the development of the schools. He did this in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee.

At the time, few children could hope for an education. Jean-Baptiste was moved by the plight of the poor who seemed, as he put it, so 'far from salvation either in this world or the next.' He decided to put his talents and education at the service of children 'often left to themselves and badly brought up.' To be more effective, in 1683, he abandoned his family home, moved in with the teachers, renounced his wealth and his position as canon, and so formed a new community of lay religious teachers. The Jean Baptiste Brothers were the first Catholic religious teaching institute that did not include priests.

His enterprise met with opposition from church authorities who resisted the creation of a new form of religious life, a community of consecrated laymen, with no priests, conducting free schools. His congregation did not receive papal approval until 1725, several years after his death. Jansenists also opposed him. The educational establishment also opposed him: they resented his

innovative methods such as replacing individual instruction by tutors with classroom teaching, the use of the vernacular rather than Latin as a medium of instruction, and his insistence on education being free, even for those who could afford to pay. To those who objected that such an approach was financially impossible, he said, ‘The more you leave to God the care of all temporal things, the more he will take care to provide for all your wants.’

Jean Baptiste wrote in his *Conduite des Écoles chrétiennes*,

It is chiefly by asking questions and in provoking explanations that the teacher must open the mind of the pupil, make him work, use his thinking powers, form his judgment, and make him find out the answer for himself. (From the *Lion Christian Quotation Collection*, p.153)

Jean Baptiste and his Brothers succeeded in creating a network of schools throughout France that featured instruction through French, the grouping of students according to ability and achievement, the integration of religious instruction and secular subjects, and well-prepared teachers with a sense of vocation and mission, and the involvement of parents.

Jean Baptiste was a pioneer in programs for training teachers. In 1687, he founded in Rheims what is generally regarded as the first teachers’ training college in France, and followed this up with two others, in Paris

in 1699, and St.-Denis in 1709. He was a pedagogical thinker of note and is considered to be among the founders of a distinctively modern pedagogy. In 1699, he expanded further to include Sunday courses for young working men, creating one of the first institutions in France for the care of delinquents, and setting up technical and secondary schools for modern languages, arts, and sciences. In 1698, he set up a school for Irish children of the exiled followers of King James II.

Jean-Baptiste died near Rouen on Good Friday 1719, at the age of sixty-seven. But his work quickly spread through France and Italy, and, after his death, especially after the French Revolution, across the globe. He was canonized in 1900, and proclaimed patron of teachers in 1950. Currently, about 6,000 brothers and 75,000 lay and religious colleagues worldwide serve as teachers, counsellors, and guides to 900,000 students in over 1,000 educational institutions in eighty-four countries.

## **SAINT STANISLAUS: 11 April**

According to tradition, Stanislaus was born into a noble family, the only son of his parents, at Szczepanów, a Polish village, on 26 July 1030. He was educated at the cathedral school in Gniezno, then the capital of Poland, and later, either in Paris or Liège. On his return to Poland, he was ordained priest by Lambert II, bishop of Krakow.

After Lambert's death in 1072, Stanislaus was elected his successor, but accepted the office only at the command of Pope Alexander II. He was one of the first local Polish bishops. He also became advisor to the local duke and had some influence in political life.

Stanislaus brought papal legates to Poland, and re-established a metropolitan see in Gniezno. This was a precondition for Duke Boleslav's coronation as king, which took place in 1076. Stanislaus then encouraged the new king to establish Benedictine monasteries to aid in the Christianization of Poland.

Stanislaus experienced conflicts with King Boleslav. The first was over land: Stanislaus had bought land for the church on the banks of the River Vistula from a certain Peter, but, after the latter's death, his family claimed it. In court, the king ruled for the claimants but, according to legend, Stanislaus resurrected Peter so that he could confirm that he had sold the land to him. The dumbfounded court heard Peter reprimand his three sons,



and testify that Stanislaus had indeed paid for the land. Unable to give any other verdict, the king dismissed the case against the bishop. Stanislaus asked Peter whether he wished to remain alive, but he declined and so was buried once more!

A more substantial conflict with the king arose after a prolonged war in Russia. There are different accounts of the conflict, but the substantial element seems to be that Boleslav suspected Stanislaus of plotting with his brother and the nobility against him. He threatened Stanislaus, who replied by excommunicating him. Boleslav then personally killed Stanislaus while he was celebrating Mass in the church of Saint Michael in Krakow about 11 April 1079. It is said that he then dismembered his body and dumped its parts in a river; but these were later re-integrated, enabling it to be buried. The killing of Stanislaus brought about what it had been intended to prevent. There was such outrage at it, both in Poland and abroad, that Boleslav was dethroned and forced to flee to Hungary. He was succeeded by his brother, Vladislav I.

Whether Stanislaus should be regarded as a hero or a traitor remains one of the unresolved questions of Polish history, but his story is similar to that of Thomas Becket who was killed by soldiers of England's King Henry II some ninety years later.

Other than the above, little is known of Stanislaus' life. His cult as a martyr began immediately after his death, and, on 17 September 1253, he was canonized by Pope

Innocent IV in Assisi. As the first native Polish saint, Stanislaus is patron of Poland. During several stages of Poland's history, when it was divided, people used to say that the country would be re-integrated just as Saint Stanislaus' body had been.

## **POPE SAINT MARTIN: 13 April**

Martin was born in Umbria, Italy. He became papal legate at Constantinople, and was highly regarded for learning and virtue. He was elected pope as Martin I on 5 July 649, the only pope during the Byzantine period whose election was not approved by the emperor in Constantinople.

One of his first acts was to summon a council at the Lateran in Rome in 649 to deal with the doctrinal issue of monothelitism. This was the idea that there was only one will in Christ, not two, a human and a divine, in harmony with each other. The council was attended by one hundred and five bishops, mainly from Italy, with a few from Africa and other places. In five sessions from 5 to 31 October, and in twenty canons, it condemned monothelitism, its authors, and the writings by which it had been promulgated. Condemned also were doctrinal statements by two patriarchs of Constantinople that had imperial sponsorship.

Martin published the council's decrees widely. He also refused to sign the *Typos*, a statement issued about 648 by Emperor Constans II declaring that only doctrinal statements defined by the first five general councils were to be accepted and forbidding discussion of the issue of monothelitism. He may have seen a need to take a stand against imperial interference in doctrinal matters. Constans responded to Martin's refusal by ordering his

governor in Italy to arrest him and to send him to Constantinople as a prisoner.

After long delays, Martin was arrested in the Lateran on 17 June 653. He was hurried out of Rome and brought first to Greece, and then to Constantinople, where he arrived on 17 September 653. There he was tried and sentenced to death, though this was commuted to banishment.

During this time, he said,

The Lord will take care of my body in his providence, whether this means more suffering or some easing of my troubles. So why should I worry? The Lord is near. But I hope that in his loving mercy he will bring me quickly to the end of the course he has laid out for me.

Meanwhile, in 654, the church in Rome chose Eugene I as his successor. After suffering an exhausting imprisonment, Martin was sent to Chersonesus, a city in Crimea. He arrived there on 15 May 655 and died on 16 September of the same year. He is considered a martyr by the church and his name is mentioned in the first Eucharistic prayer of the Bobbio Missal of northern Italy.

## **SAINT BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS: 16 April**

Bernadette Soubirous was born, the eldest of nine children, on 7 January 1844 into a poor family at the bottom of the social scale. She was uneducated and illiterate; her efforts at learning the catechism failed. She was under-sized, in poor health, experienced cholera as an infant, and suffered in particular from asthma. Her parents seem not to have been great providers and quickly lost whatever possessions they had begun with, so that the family had to leave their home and go and live in an abandoned shed, part of a derelict jail. There was never enough food. The children used to search locally for refuse that might have some re-sale value, and ate pieces of wax that fell from candles in the church. Bernadette, as the eldest, held the principal responsibility for the children as her mother seems to have been incapable. In all of this, she was known for her gentleness.

Her father worked in a local flour mill. Paradoxically, a bad harvest, followed by a severe food shortage, created an unexpected crisis for him and the family. People were starving, and the French government sent relief supplies of flour. This meant that there was no need of the services of the mill, which was forced to shut down for lack of work. Then his back was severely injured when a roofing beam collapsed on him, and he was permanently invalided. From being the breadwinner he came to be in need of full-time care.

On 11 February 1858, while gathering firewood beside the River Gave, Bernadette had the first of a series of eighteen visions of Our Lady who appeared under the title of her Immaculate Conception in a cave at Massabielle near Lourdes. These continued until 16 July. She described Our Lady as looking ‘like a girl, not much bigger than myself – uo petito damizelo.’ No one but she saw the apparitions. In them, Our Lady asked that people should drink of the water of the spring and that a church be built there as a place of prayer and penance. Constructed on a nearby rubbish dump, it was completed in 1879. Reported cures attributed to drinking the water, Bernadette spoke of as the consequence of faith and prayer. The essential message of Our Lady at Lourdes is the evangelical one of prayer and penance.

Mary spoke to Bernadette in the local patois, a mixture of Occitan French, Catalan and Basque, saying: ‘Qué soi era immaculado councepciou’ rather than the formal French, ‘Je suis l’Imaculée Conception.’

No one, including the parish priest, believed Bernadette at first, but later, when he did come to believe in the truth of what she was saying, he became her strong supporter. The phrase ‘Immaculate Conception’ was a new one in people’s religious vocabulary at the time and he was very surprised that an uneducated girl should have heard of it.

It was only four years before that Pope Pius IX, in the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, of 8 December 1854, had defined

the dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary, stating: -

the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, has been, by a special grace and privilege of Almighty God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, preserved and exempted from every stain of original sin.

Bernadette showed great firmness of character in that, despite her family's poverty, she (and they) always refused offers of money. She was similarly firm in rejecting the "pious" efforts of well-meaning fools, priests among them, to embellish what she had seen and heard. She stood by her simple story as the truth, no more, no less.

In 1859, Bernadette joined the school of the Sisters of Notre Dame in Lourdes; there, at last, she learned how to read and write. In 1866, she entered the Sisters' convent at Nevers. During her life there, she had to put up with people's curiosity, and the lack of consideration on the part of well-intentioned admirers, especially those who bothered her with endless interrogations, anxious that she should confirm the additions they had made to her story. She would sometimes say, 'Why can't they leave me in peace!'

The Mother Superior of the convent also gave her a hard time, later admitting that she always spoke roughly to her because she saw her as nothing more than an ignorant peasant who should never have received divine

favours. By contrast, Bernadette said of Our Lady, that, 'No one ever spoke to the Soubirous like she did.'

Bernadette died on 16 April 1879 at the age of thirty-five, probably of tuberculosis. Her last words were, 'Blessed Mary, Mother of God, pray for me, a poor sinner.' She was canonized in 1933.

Some said of Bernadette that her most outstanding characteristic was life-long witness to the belief that the truth is sufficient; it doesn't need or benefit from human embellishment.



## SAINT ANSELM: 21 April

Anselm was born about 1033 in the Val d'Aosta region of northern Italy. His family were of minor nobility. At the age of fifteen, Anselm tried to enter a monastery but could not obtain his father's consent, so the abbot refused to accept him. Anselm became ill, but, on recovering, gave up study and lived a carefree life. When his mother died, his father, a harsh man, became unbearable, so Anselm left home, crossed the Alps, and wandered through Burgundy and France, arriving in Normandy in 1059. He entered the Benedictine abbey of Bec at the age of twenty-seven. Just four years later, he was elected prior in succession to Lanfranc; after fifteen years, he was elected abbot.

Under Anselm's leadership, Bec became the foremost seat of learning in Europe, attracting students from France, Italy and elsewhere. It was at Bec that he wrote his first works of philosophy, the *Monologion* (1076) and the *Proslogion* (1077–8). These were followed by *The Dialogues on Truth, Free Will* and *The Fall of the Devil*. In these he set out to describe a rational basis for faith. During his time at Bec, Anselm worked to maintain its freedom from both political and episcopal control.

Anselm occasionally visited England to see the abbey's property there, as well as to visit Lanfranc. In 1070, Lanfranc became archbishop of Canterbury. Anselm

made a good impression in England, and was seen as Lanfranc's natural successor as archbishop.

The background to most of what followed in Anselm's life was the issue of lay investiture. At the time, it was common for kings and other rulers to claim a right to choose new bishops, to control communication between them and the pope, to use diocesan revenue for themselves during vacancies, and to expect dioceses and monasteries to help finance wars. Reforming popes, such as Gregory VII and Urban II wanted to free the church from this control; Anselm shared their view.

From the time of Lanfranc's death in 1089, Anselm as his successor was involved in almost twenty years of conflict with Kings William II and Henry I over the issue of royal control of the church, leading to Anselm several times going into exile. Surprisingly, in 1095, at a council of bishops and nobles, the bishops supported the king against Anselm, while the nobles supported Anselm against the king. Even reforming popes, while sometimes supporting Anselm, sometimes also refused to get involved, and there was a time when Anselm was undermined by secret negotiations between the king and a papal envoy. Anselm was not unskilled in politics, and moved when the king's weakness gave him most leverage in the interests of reform. But he was also constant in enhancing the status of Canterbury, especially over York, and called himself primate of Great Britain and Ireland.

Finally, after much conflict, Henry agreed, under the terms of the Concordat of London in 1107, to surrender his claim to a right to appoint bishops, and restored churches seized by William. Anselm, for his part, agreed to do him homage as king.

Called the founder of Scholasticism, Anselm was a major influence in Western philosophy, epistemology and theology. Following Saint Augustine, he insisted that faith and reason are complementary. He wrote, 'I long to understand to some degree your truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe that I may understand. I believe that, unless I first believe, I shall not understand.' He attempted to offer a rational basis for belief, holding that faith seeks understanding.

His philosophical search for God was never simply an intellectual exercise. He wrote, 'That I may seek you desiring you, that I may desire you seeking you, that I may find you loving you, and that, loving you, I may find you again.' (*Proslogion*, 1) And also, 'God often works more by the illiterate seeking the things of God than by the learned seeking the things that are their own.'

Anselm is famous as the originator of the ontological argument for the existence of God. He argued that, if God is a reality greater than which nothing may be conceived, then God must necessarily exist, because, if God did not exist, then God would not be the greatest reality that can be conceived of. This argument, while

influential, persuading Bertrand Russell for a time, is seen, by Saint Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant among others, as being invalid because it involves reasoning from the logical to the real order.

More influential has been his satisfaction theory of atonement as set out in his *Cur Deus Homo*. He held that human sin outraged the justice of God, who, being infinite, needed to have satisfaction made to him in an infinite manner. Only Jesus, God and man, could do this. His death on the cross satisfied God's anger with humanity and brought about atonement. The influence of this theory is widely regarded as having been more harmful than helpful, since it led to an image of God as vindictive, demanding the death of his Son to assuage his anger.

Anselm died on 21 April 1109. His canonization was requested by Thomas Becket in 1163. He may have been formally canonized at some point before Becket's death in 1170, but no explicit record has survived, even though he was henceforth included among the saints at Canterbury and elsewhere. He was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1720.

He is the author of many prayers, such as: -

‘We bring before you, Lord, the troubles and perils of peoples and nations, the sighing of those unjustly imprisoned, the sorrows of the bereaved, the necessities of strangers, the helplessness of the weak, the despondency of the weary and the failing powers of the

aged. Lord, draw near to each, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

'Teach me to seek you, and to the searcher show yourself; for I can neither seek you unless you teach me how, nor find you unless you make yourself known. Let me seek you by my desire and grow in desire by seeking you. Let me find you by loving and grow in love by finding you.' (*Proslogion*, 1)

'Lord God, you are life, wisdom, truth, bounty and blessedness, the Eternal, the one true good. My God and my Lord, you are my hope and my heart's joy. I confess with thanksgiving that you have made me in your image that I may direct all my thoughts to you and love you rightly, that I may more and more love and possess you. And since in the life here below, I cannot fully attain this blessedness, let it at least grow in me day by day, until at last it be fulfilled in the life to come. Here may the knowledge of you be increased, and there may it be perfected. Here may my love of you grow, and there may it ripen, so that my joy being here great in hope may there in fruition be made perfect. Amen.'

'Jesus, as a mother you gather your people to you; you are gentle with us as a mother with her children. Often you weep over our sins and our pride; tenderly you draw us from hatred and from judgment. You comfort us in sorrow and bind up our wounds; in sickness you nurse us and feed us. Jesus, by your dying we are born to new life; by your anguish and labour we come forth in joy.'

Despair turns to hope through your loving goodness;  
through your gentleness we find comfort in fear.

Your warmth gives life to the dead, your touch makes  
sinners righteous.

Lord Jesus, in your mercy, heal us; in your love and  
tenderness, remake us.

In your compassion, bring grace and forgiveness; for the  
beauty of heaven, may your love prepare us. Amen.'

'Fountain of love, love our friends, and teach them to  
love you with all their hearts, so that they may think, and  
speak, and do only those things that are well-pleasing to  
you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

'Lord Jesus Christ, let me seek you by desiring you, and  
let me desire you by seeking you; let me find you by  
loving you and love you in finding you. I confess, Lord,  
with thanksgiving that you have made me in your image  
so that I can remember you, think of you, and love you.  
But that image is so worn and so blotted out by faults  
and darkened by sin that it cannot do that for which it  
was made, unless you renew and refashion it. Lord, I am  
not trying to make my way to your height, for my  
understanding is in no way equal to that, but I do desire  
to understand a little of your truth which my heart  
already believes and loves. I do not seek to understand  
so that I can believe, but I believe so that I may  
understand; and, what is more, I believe that unless I do  
believe, I shall not understand. Amen.

'Merciful God, we ask you to fill our hearts with the  
graces of the Holy Spirit, with love, joy, peace,  
longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and

temperance. Teach us to love those who hate us, and to pray for those who treat us with contempt, so that we may be the children of you our Father who make the sun shine on the evil and the good, and the rain to fall on unjust and just alike. In hard times grant us to be patient; in good times keep us humble; may we guard our lips; may we treat lightly the pleasures of this world and thirst after those of eternity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.’

‘Father most merciful, who in the beginning created us, and by the Passion and death of your only-begotten Son have created us anew, we ask you to bring us now both to desire and to do your will. And since we are weak and can do nothing of ourselves, we ask you for your blessing that whatever we do may be for your honour and glory. Keep us free from sin and active in doing good for as long as we live. And after our departure from this life may we receive pardon of our sins and attain to eternal life, through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.’

‘Holy Spirit, you who are the source of every good and perfect gift, pour the cheering light of your seven-fold gifts into our hearts. Spirit of love and gentleness, we ask your help. You know our faults, our failings, our needs, the dullness of our understanding, the waywardness of our affection, the perversity of our will. And so, when we do not practise what we know, come to us, we ask you, with your grace, enlighten our minds, rectify our desires, correct our wanderings and pardon our omissions, so that, by your guidance, we may be

preserved from squandering the gift of faith but rather keep a good conscience, and come at the end safely into your presence and enjoy eternal rest; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

Here is one of his sayings: -

'Love is the one thing [God] asks for; without this he cannot give it [the kingdom]. Give love, then, and receive the kingdom: love, and it is yours.' (Letter 112, *Opera Omnia*, 3.246.)



## SAINT GEORGE: 23 April

George was born between 275 and 285 to a Greek Christian family in Lydda, (Lod) now in Israel. His name means *a worker of the land*. His father died when he was fourteen, and his mother a few years later.

Then George decided to go to Nicomedia, an imperial city in Asia Minor, and apply to Emperor Diocletian for a career as a soldier. Diocletian welcomed him warmly, as he had known his father as one of his finest soldiers. By his late twenties, George was promoted to the rank of tribune and was part of the emperor's bodyguard.

In 302, Diocletian issued an edict that every Christian soldier in the army should be arrested and required to offer sacrifice to the Roman gods. George objected and made this known to the emperor. Diocletian did not want to lose his tribune and son of a respected former officer. But George, in front of his fellow soldiers and tribunes, proclaimed himself a Christian and professed his worship of Jesus Christ. Diocletian attempted to convert him, offering gifts of land, money and slaves if he offered sacrifice to the gods. But George refused. After prolonged and severe torture, Diocletian had him beheaded on 23 April 303. Before the execution George gave his wealth to the poor.

His body was returned to Lydda for burial, where Christians soon came to honour him as a martyr. Bodies, said to be his, are found in Syria and Egypt, among other

places. He is known, respected and venerated by Muslims throughout the Middle East. He has become a composite character, mixing elements from Biblical, Koranic and other sources. His shrine in Beirut is visited by Muslim women, while another at Beit Jalla near Jerusalem is visited by Jews, Christians and Muslims. There is another in Syria.

The story that George's execution led to the conversion of Diocletian's wife, Alexandra, seems to have no historical basis, while the story that he killed a dragon was unknown before the time of the Crusaders, to whom George became the model of chivalry.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* takes the position that there seems no ground for doubting George's existence, but that little credence can be given to some of the stories about him. In 494, George was canonized by Pope Gelasius I, who said that he was among those 'whose names are justly revered by the people, but whose actions are known only to God.'

George is venerated in the Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox churches, the latter honouring him with the title of *Great Martyr*, while Copts call him the *Prince of Martyrs*. He is patron saint of many countries, including Georgia, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, England, Lithuania and Portugal, as well as many cities and the British scout movement. In Georgia, there are 365 churches named in his honour, and he is a symbol of national liberation. In England, when the Reformation

severely curtailed the saints' days in the calendar, Saint George's day was among those that continued to be observed; he is patron of the English royal family, and his cross forms the English national flag.

There are many icons of him in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow where the story of his killing the dragon is presented as a parable of the struggle between good and evil. In this version, the dragon (evil) does not die, and the struggle is constant.

## **SAINT ADALBERT: 23 April**

Adalbert, named Vojtěch (Wojciech) at birth, was one of seven sons born about 956 into a noble Czech family in Bohemia. He received a good education, studying for about ten years (970-80) under Saint Adalbert of Magdeburg. Upon Saint Adalbert's death, Wojciech took his name, while his half-brother Radim, who also wished to be a priest, took the name of Gaudentius.

In 980, Adalbert returned to Prague where he was ordained. Two years later, following his father's death, he was appointed bishop of Prague. Although he was from a rich family, Adalbert chose to live a simple life. He was noted for charity, austerity, and service to the Church. His work was difficult even in Bohemia, where the people, although baptized, still clung to pagan customs and lifestyles such as participation in the slave trade.

In 989, he resigned from his office and left Prague. He went to Rome and lived as a hermit in a Benedictine monastery. But, four years later, Pope John XV sent him back to Bohemia to resume his office. He founded a monastery near Prague, the first in the country. But the nobility continued to oppose him.

Four of his brothers were killed in battle in 995. After this he left Prague and went to Hungary where he baptized the king and his son, Stephen, in Esztergom. Then he went to Poland where he was welcomed by

Bolesław I, the Brave. After a short visit, he went to Prussia on a mission of conversion.

Adalbert had already considered becoming a missionary in Prussia. After he had converted Hungary, he was sent by the pope to convert the pagan Prussians. Adalbert and his followers - including his half-brother Gaudentius - entered Prussian territory and went along the Baltic coast to Gdańsk.

It was standard procedure for Christian missionaries to chop down sacred oak trees, as they had done in many places. Because the trees were worshipped and the spirits believed to inhabit the trees were feared for their powers, this was done to demonstrate to non-Christians that the trees had no supernatural power. When Adalbert did not heed warnings to stay away from the oak groves, he was killed on 23 April 997 on the Baltic Sea coast.

A few years later he was canonized as Saint Adalbert of Prague. His life has been written by various writers, including Saint Bruno of Querfurt in 1001–1004.

His body was divided and sent to various churches as relics. King Bolesław the Brave's position in Europe was enhanced by his possession of the relics. But two of the saint's "heads" are venerated, one in Prague, the other in Gniezno, near Warsaw! There has been much dispute over which is the genuine article.

The thousandth anniversary of Adalbert's martyrdom was commemorated in the Czech Republic, Poland,

Germany, Russia and other countries in 1997. Representatives of Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Evangelical churches made pilgrimage to his reputed tomb in Gniezno. John Paul II went there and led ceremonies in which about a million believers took part. Adalbert is patron saint of Bohemia, Poland, Hungary and Prussia.

## SAINT FIDELIS of SIGMARINGEN: 24 April

Mark Rey (or Roy) was born at Sigmaringen in Germany in 1577. When he had completed his studies in philosophy and law at the University of Freiburg im Breisgau, the parents of three young noblemen were looking for a tutor who would accompany their sons on a “Grand Tour” of Europe. Professors at the university drew their attention to Mark whom they considered qualified for the position by both moral and mental gifts. He accepted the position, and the group began their journey in 1604. To the young men who had been entrusted to his care, he pointed out not only things of cultural interest but matters of spiritual significance also. He himself was a remarkable example. In six years of supervising their travels he frequently attended Mass. In every town where he came, he visited hospitals and churches, passed several hours on his knees in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and sometimes gave the poor the clothes off his back. The young men said they never saw him angry.

Returning home, Mark followed the legal profession as an advocate at Colmar in Alsace, where he became known as the “poor man's lawyer.” He carefully avoided saying anything that might detract from the reputation of an adversary. He gained a doctorate in law, and then went on to teach it at his *alma mater*. But he became disillusioned with his profession when he saw that some lawyers, motivated by greed, acted unjustly: on one occasion, he overheard them discuss how to prolong a

case so as to win larger fees. (Charles Dickens' novel, *Bleak House*, is on this theme.) It was this that finally prompted him to abandon law.

Mark had an older brother in the Capuchins, so it was natural that he should think of them. He joined the order in 1612, receiving the name of Fidelis, meaning faithful. He quickly completed his theology studies, and, after ordination to the priesthood, was appointed preacher. In community, he was considered to be a wise adviser and was appointed Guardian (local leader) after only a few years.

In this position he worked hard to promote Capuchin life. He insisted on the strict observance of poverty, tolerating no violation of it. But he was stricter towards himself than to others, and was especially kind to friars who were ill. When a disease broke out among the soldiers of the garrison in the town of Feldkirch he personally undertook their care and gave them every service he could.

In 1622, the Vatican Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*, (now today as the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples), which had been set up shortly before by Pope Gregory XV, sent Fidelis to the Grisons area of Switzerland with eight other friars to counter the influence of the followers of John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. His work in the Grisons was so successful that it aroused the hostility of his opponents. The local bishop (of Coire) sent a full account of his work to the Congregation in Rome. Fidelis had long



prayed to God that he would be given the grace of martyrdom. Now his prayer was about to be heard.

On 24 April 1622, he went to confession, celebrated Mass and preached. At the end of the sermon, which he delivered with exceptional fervour, he stood silently for a while, seemingly in ecstasy. He had already foretold his death to several persons, and began signing his letters, 'Father Fidelis, near to the day when he becomes food for worms.' He travelled to Seewis, and his companions on the way noted that he was particularly cheerful. He used to say, 'It is because of faith that we exchange the present for the future.'

On arrival, he was shot at by a Calvinist. Local Catholics urged him to leave for his safety, and he did so, but later decided to return. On his way back he was confronted by twenty Calvinist soldiers who demanded that he renounce the Catholic faith. When he refused, they killed him. His remains are buried in the Capuchin church at Weltkirchen, Feldkirch, Austria.

He was the first member of the new Congregation to die for the Catholic faith. Fidelis had indeed been faithful until death and received the crown of life. (Revelation 2.10) He was canonized by Pope Benedict XIV in 1746.

## **SAINT MARK THE EVANGELIST: 25 April**

Mark is commonly identified with the John Mark of Acts (12.12, 25; 15.37, 39, and 1 Peter 5.13), who lived in Jerusalem, and accompanied Barnabas, his cousin (Colossians 4.10), and Paul on their first missionary journey. He may have been a prisoner with Paul in Rome. The gospel which bears his name does not state who wrote it, and the ascription to Mark comes from tradition. John is a Jewish forename, while Mark is a Greek surname. Described as a disciple and possible interpreter of Peter's, Mark nonetheless gives Peter no greater prominence than do Matthew or Luke. Mark was probably a Greek-speaking Jew from the Jerusalem area.

Mark wrote in Greek, in a style which was basic, but vivid and detailed; he likes statistics. A skilful writer, he knows how to select material, to edit it for his own purpose, and to place it for greatest effect. He uses a "sandwich" technique in which he brackets a story within another for special effect. He in-builds mnemonics for ease of memorization. But he is regarded as not having been an eye-witness to the events he describes; his references to Palestinian geography are sometimes inaccurate. Unlike Matthew, he is not greatly concerned to establish links with the Hebrew bible (the Old Testament), and some of his attempts to do so are unconvincing. He writes neither a biography nor a history but a gospel, that is, a work of faith addressed to faith. He is not interested in chronological sequence, nor

accuracy in reporting events as a reporter might be expected to write them up.

Mark's is the earliest of the four gospels, written after Peter's death, probably between 65 and 70. It was used as a source by Matthew and Luke, so it seems that it must have been regarded as faithful to the original preaching of the apostles about Jesus. Mark drew on existing traditions, both written and oral, from the community of faith before him, perhaps in and around Jerusalem, with Peter perhaps being prominent among his sources. According to Papias, Mark, who was Peter's interpreter and close associate, his "son" (1 Peter 5.13), wrote down Peter's sermons and they became the basis of his Gospel. His audience was probably one of Gentile Christians, unfamiliar with Jewish customs, and living either in Rome or Roman territory; so Mark explains Jewish words and customs. His readers were people of the second generation of Christians who needed a written record, as the original eye-witnesses were dying off. Probably with their interests in mind, Mark writes with a universalist perspective, taking care to include Gentiles in Jesus' mission. He omits an account of Jesus' birth or early years, but, with characteristic brevity, sees the opening thirteen verses as adequately setting the scene. Jesus is there depicted as both royal Messiah and Suffering Servant.

Although Mark begins his gospel, saying, 'the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (1.1), he clearly shows Jesus as a man. He is not afraid of the humanity of Jesus, as if it should be down-

played in order to highlight his divinity. The matter is not an either-or, but both. For Mark, Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, is the human face and presence of God. He presents a picture of Jesus, who, after an initially enthusiastic response, loses support when people came to see, and be disappointed, that his mission was not that of a political liberator who would drive out the Romans and restore the kingdom of Israel. Mark focuses on why Jesus, although neither understood nor accepted, was nonetheless truly God's messenger who carried out his mission. For Mark, Jesus is the crucified Messiah. He contrasts the recognition and acceptance of Jesus by God, devils, angels, and many ordinary people, with his being misunderstood by his relatives and disciples, and opposed by the religious authorities. While the resurrection of Jesus is God's ultimate answer to Jesus' opponents, their opposition is itself used by God to fulfil the scriptures. The way of Jesus, that of humility and suffering, is in contrast to the prevailing Jewish hopes of a triumphant warrior-king.

Mark's gospel is organized around the idea that, in order to understand the parables, sayings, and teachings of Jesus, one must accept him as the one sent by God, destined to be rejected, to suffer, to die, and to be raised to life again by God. There is a significant turning-point around this theme in 8.27-30. To understand Jesus, and what it means to follow him, his disciples must understand and accept that his way is one of suffering.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, who devote much space to Jesus' teaching, Mark's primary concern in the first part

of his gospel, that is, up to 8.26, is with the miracles of Jesus; they point to the coming of God's rule. They are meant to answer the question about Jesus, 'Who then is this?' (4.41) He cites many "works of power" by him, especially exorcisms, in which evil spirits proclaim him as Son of God. He presents Jesus as a prophet, healer, exorcist, teacher, the messiah whom he identifies with the Suffering Servant of God, and, especially, as Son of God who will suffer, die, and rise again.

In Mark, the mission of Jesus is to die and to rise. For him, what matters is that Jesus was the Messiah, the Suffering Servant of God, the Son of God, who proclaimed the kingdom, taught, worked wonders, suffered, died, and rose. These events were historical and saving. A secondary theme is that of the kingdom of God which Mark sees as a future reality; it has been called Jesus' resistance movement to the prevailing standards of the world.

The "messianic secret" is an important theme in Mark's gospel. During his public ministry, Jesus did not claim to be Messiah, but neither did he deny that he was. The only title he claimed was that of Son of Man, a title which essentially means 'a man'. He concealed his identity as Messiah until late (see 14.61b-62), probably because of the mistaken hopes it would arouse of his being a political messiah who would drive out the Romans and re-establish the kingdom of Israel. He could then safely make the claim, since his situation as a helpless prisoner precluded such misrepresentation of him. Jesus was Messiah, but it was only when he had

endured suffering and death, that the title could be given him by God. The secrecy and mystery about the title relates more to Jesus as Son of God than as Messiah; the title of Messiah is misplaced.

Jesus changed people's ideas about God: the means God chooses to achieve his goals are not power and majesty, but humility and suffering. Mark's gospel, a passion narrative with an extended introduction, shows Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection as inseparable. And, as for the master, so also for the disciple. While Paul gives a theology about Jesus, Mark puts a human face on him. But Mark is only the messenger; his message is 'the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' (Mark 1.1)

It is said that, about 49 AD, Mark became the founder of the church in Africa, and bishop in Alexandria. Coptic tradition has him dying a martyr's death in 68 AD.

## **SAINT PETER CHANEL: 28 April**

Peter Louis Marie Chanel was born in Cuët, in the diocese of Belley, France, on 12 July 1803, the fifth of eight children. From the age of seven to twelve he worked as a shepherd. After attending a local school, his piety and intelligence attracted the attention of a visiting priest, Father Trompier, who arranged for him to go further in his education.

Peter made his first Communion at the age of thirteen. It was from that time that his attraction to the foreign missions began. This was the result of reading letters from missionaries sent back from America by the French bishop Du Bourg. He later said, 'It was in that year that I formed the idea of going on the foreign missions.'

He entered a minor seminary in 1819, and won several awards in Latin, Christian doctrine and speech. In 1824, he entered major seminary. He was ordained just three years later, along with twenty-four others, on 15 July 1827, and spent a short time as a curate in the parish of Ambérieux. He received letters from a former curate of the same parish who was then a missionary in India. And he met Father Claude Bret, who was to become his friend and also one of the first Marist missionaries.

The following year, Peter applied to his bishop for permission to go on the missions. His application was refused. Instead he was appointed for the next three years as parish priest of the run-down parish of Crozet,

which he revitalized in a short time. His zeal was widely respected, and his care, particularly of the sick, won the hearts of the locals, who began to return to the sacraments. During this time, Peter heard of a group of priests who were hopeful of starting a religious order to be dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

In 1831, he joined the nascent Society of Mary (Marists), who would concentrate on missionary work at home and abroad. Instead of selecting him as a missionary, however, the Marists used his talents as spiritual director of a seminary, where he stayed for five years. In 1833, he accompanied Father Jean-Claude Colin to Rome to seek approval of the new society. In 1836, the Marists, finally approved by Pope Gregory XVI, were asked to send missionaries to the territory of the South West Pacific. Peter, who made his profession of vows as a Marist in 1836, was made the superior of a band of Marist missionaries that set out on 24 December 1836 from Le Havre. They were accompanied by Bishop Jean Baptiste Pompallier who was to become the first bishop in New Zealand.

In a voyage that lasted nearly a year, Peter travelled first to the Canary Islands where his friend, Father Bret, contracted a virus that led to his death at sea in 1837. Then, he and his companions went to Valparaiso in Chile, Gambier Island off the south coast of Australia, to Tahiti and then, accompanied by Brother Marie-Nizier Delorme, onwards to Futuna Island, north-east of Fiji, arriving on 8 November 1837.



To begin with, he was well received by the island's king, Niuliki. But once he learned the local language and began preaching directly to the people, the king grew restive. He believed that the Christian faith would take away his prerogatives as high priest and king. When his son, Meitala, asked for baptism, the king sent a favoured warrior, his son-in-law, Musumusu, to "do whatever is necessary to solve the problem." (This was like King Henry II of England saying of Thomas Becket, 'Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?' though it was more subtle and better wrapped in plausible deniability.) Musumusu initially went to Meitala, and the two fought. Musumusu, injured, went to Peter asking for medical attention. While Peter tended him, a group of others ransacked his house. Then Musumusu took an axe and clubbed Peter on the head, killing him. It was 28 April 1841; Peter was just thirty-seven.

The news of his death took a year to reach his home country. His body was brought first to New Zealand and then to France for burial but, in later years, was returned to Futuna. On the island itself, conversions followed in large numbers, including that of Musumusu, Peter's killer. It is said that, when dying, as a sign of penance, he asked to be buried outside the door of the church so that people would walk on his grave when entering. As a kind of penance, a special action song and dance, known as the *eke*, was created by the people of Futuna shortly after Peter's death. It is still performed in Tonga.

Peter was declared a martyr and was canonized in 1954.

**SAINT LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNION de  
MONTFORT: 28 April.**

Louis-Marie was born near the town of Montfort in Brittany, France, on 31 January 1673, the eldest surviving child of the large family of Jean-Baptiste Grignon, a notary, and his wife, Jeanne Robert, who was deeply Catholic. He passed most of his infancy and childhood near Montfort-sur-Meu, where his father had a farm. Louis-Marie had a strained relationship with his father, who had a violent temper. A biographer described this as making his path through life tormented, adding that his journey to maturity was long and arduous and he was in his forties before he achieved what might be called a balanced life.

At the age of twelve, he entered the Jesuit College of Saint Thomas Becket in Rennes. When secondary school ended, he began the study of philosophy and theology at the same college. But, listening to a local priest speak about his life as an itinerant missionary, Louis-Marie was inspired to preach missions among the very poor. He also began to develop a strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Then he was given the opportunity, through a benefactor, of going to Paris to study at the renowned seminary of Saint-Sulpice. When he arrived, he found that the benefactor had not provided enough money, so he had to lodge in a succession of boarding houses, living among the very poor. After less than two years, he

became seriously ill and had to be hospitalized. He survived his hospitalization and the blood-letting which was part of the prevailing treatment.

On discharge from hospital, he entered the seminary of Little Saint Sulpice in 1695. He was appointed librarian, and this gave him the opportunity of studying most of the available works on spirituality and, in particular, on the Virgin Mary's place in the Christian life. This led to his focus on the Rosary and to writing his book *The Secret of the Rosary*.

Even as a seminarian in Paris, Montfort was known for the veneration he had for angels. This was part of the spirituality of the time as promoted by Cardinal de Bérulle, Jean-Jacques Olier the founder of Saint Sulpice, and the Jesuits.

Louis-Marie was ordained in June 1700, and assigned to Nantes and later to Poitiers. He felt frustrated at the lack of opportunity to preach as he felt called to do. He considered various options, even that of becoming a hermit, but the conviction that he was called to preach missions to the poor increased.

Five months after ordination, he joined the Third Order of Saint Dominic and asked permission to form rosary confraternities. The same month he wrote, 'I am continually asking in my prayers for a company of good priests to preach missions and retreats under the standard and protection of the Blessed Virgin.' Frustrated with the local bishops, he made a pilgrimage to Rome, to ask

Pope Clement XI what he should do. The pope told him that there was plenty of scope for his projected mission in France, and gave him the title of Apostolic Missionary. This eventually led to the formation of the Company of Mary.

At around this time, he met Blessed Marie Louise Trichet. Their meeting was the start of her thirty-four years of service to the poor. Together, in 1715, they founded a congregation called the Daughters of Wisdom.

For several years, Louis-Marie preached missions throughout France. He became known as "the good father from Montfort." He was constantly occupied in preaching missions, especially in the west of France, traveling on foot between one and another. The heated style of his preaching was regarded by some as strange, and he was poisoned once. Although it did not prove fatal, it caused his health to deteriorate. Yet he continued preaching undeterred.

He made time to write: - the *Treatise on True Devotion to Mary*, which was lost and found again only in 1842, *The Secret of Mary* and *The Secret of the Rosary*, rules for the Company of Mary and for the Daughters of Wisdom, and some 20,000 verses of hymns and verses. The latter were meant to be sung in churches and in the homes of the poor; their purpose was missionary. His collected writings were published under the title *God Alone*. This was his motto and he used to say, 'If we do not risk anything for God we will never do anything great for him.'

Worn out by hard work and illness, he began, in April 1716, preaching a mission which was to be his last. During it, he fell ill and died at Saint Laurent sur Sèvre on the 28<sup>th</sup>. He was just forty-three years old, and had been a priest for only sixteen years. His last sermon was on the tenderness of Jesus and the Incarnate Wisdom of the Father. Thousands gathered for his burial in the parish church, and very quickly there were stories of miracles performed at his tomb.

The congregations he left behind - the Company of Mary, the Daughters of Wisdom, and the Brothers of Saint Gabriel - grew, first in France, then beyond it. Exactly forty-three years later, on April 28, 1759, Marie Louise Trichet also died in the same place and was buried next to him.

Here are two extracts from sermons of his: -

Do as the storekeeper does with his merchandise; make a profit on every article. Do not allow the loss of the smallest bit of the cross. It may only be the sting of a fly or the point of a pin that annoys you; it may be the mild eccentricities of a neighbour, some unintentional slight, the loss of a penny, some small restlessness of the soul, a little physical weakness, a light pain in your arms or legs. Like the grocer, make a profit on every article, and you will soon be wealthy in God.

To suffer a lot, but badly, is to suffer like reprobates.

To suffer, even bravely, but for an evil cause, is to be a martyr for the devil.

To suffer much or little for the sake of God is to suffer like a saint.

## **SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA: 29 April**

Catherine Benincasa was born in Siena, Italy, in 1347. She and her twin sister, Giovanna, were premature. Their mother already had twenty-two children, of whom half lived; she gave birth to twenty-five children in all.

At the time of her birth, the Black Death, probably bubonic plague, had hit the area and caused severe loss of life. In a few years, the plague took the lives of one-third of the population of Europe, and half of England's. It seemed to strike arbitrarily: a densely populated country like the Netherlands escaped lightly, while Iceland, remote and thinly populated, lost sixty per cent of its population. In Ireland, the Pale suffered badly but the rest of the country much less. Many of the cities of the Plain of Lombardy were devastated, but Milan escaped.

Catherine had a vision of Christ when she was five or six. She said that Jesus smiled at her, blessed her, and left her in ecstasy. At the age of seven, she vowed a life of chastity.

When an older sister, Bonaventura, died in childbirth, Catherine's parents wished her to marry the widower. She wanted none of it, knowing he had not treated her sister well. So she cut off her hair, saying that doing so made her feel happy, and she fasted. Her formula for coping with difficult times was, as she said, to 'Build a cell in your heart from which you can never flee and

retire there to pray.’ Eventually her father gave up and let her live as she pleased.

She had a vision of Saint Dominic which led her to want to join the Dominican nuns. Instead, however, she was admitted to the Third Order of Saint Dominic over the protests of its members, who were widows. She lived at home with her family – the house still stands - but in solitude and silence. She often gave away family food and clothing without asking anyone. Over the years she ate less and less, saying she found no nourishment in earthly food. Instead she received Holy Communion almost daily. The severity of her fasting appeared unhealthy in the eyes of the clergy and her own sisterhood. Her confessor, Blessed Raymond of Capua, ordered her to eat properly, but she said she was unable to. If she ate, she would vomit and suffer stomach pains, which she described as another penance.

Catherine said that by staying with her family under those conditions, she could live out her rejection of them more strongly. Living with her must have been difficult.

About 1366, Catherine experienced what she described in her letters as a mystical marriage with Jesus. Her biographer, the Dominican Master General, Blessed Raymond of Capua, wrote that, in addition, she bore the stigmata and had received Holy Communion from Jesus himself. He also told her that Jesus wanted her to leave her solitary life and serve God in public affairs.



And so, Catherine dedicated much of her life to helping the sick and the poor, and took care of them in hospital or in their homes. Her early activities attracted followers, both women and men. This led to her being interrogated as a possible heretic. She was acquitted, and then began traveling with her followers throughout northern and central Italy advocating reform of the clergy, the launching of a new crusade, and advising people that repentance and renewal could be brought about through total love for God.

The Dominicans had taught her to read and write, so, in the early 1370s, she began writing letters, of which some three hundred survive, a third of them to women. She wrote or dictated first to people of her own circle, and then to a wider audience, including popes, kings and queens. She asked for peace among the various states in Italy, and the return of the papacy from Avignon to Rome. She carried on a long correspondence with Pope Gregory XI, asking him to reform the clergy and the administration of the Papal States.

In 1376, Catherine went to Avignon as ambassador of Florence to make peace with the Papal States, but was unsuccessful. She encouraged Pope Gregory XI in his determination to return to Rome. She impressed him so much that he returned the following year. Following his death, and during the Western Schism of 1378, she was an adherent of Pope Urban VI, who called her to Rome. She stayed there until her death in 1380, trying to convince others of his legitimacy. Always concerned

about the schism, she used to say that the greater the suffering, the greater was her triumph.

Her major written work is *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*, a dialogue between a soul and God, as recorded between 1377 and 1378. It focuses on Christ crucified, his blood being a pledge of his love for humanity. For one who fasted so much, it is surprising that in it she wrote, 'The good religious visits the refectory often.'

Catherine died in Rome on 29 April 1380, at the age of thirty-three, having suffered a stroke eight days earlier. Her funeral was attended by her mother, who lived to be eighty-nine. Afterwards, miracles were reported at the grave.

Eccentric Catherine may have been, but she had extraordinary influence for a woman of her time. Pope Pius II canonized her in 1461. In 1940, Pope Pius XII named her joint patron of Italy along with Saint Francis of Assisi. In 1970, Pope Paul VI gave her, along with Saint Teresa of Ávila, the title of Doctor of the Church, making them the first women to receive this honour. In 1999, Pope John Paul II declared her one of Europe's patron saints.

Here are some extracts from her writings: -

‘As long as we live in hatred of our neighbours we are hating our own selves, because hatred deprives us of divine charity. How stupidly blind not to see that with

the sword of hatred of our neighbour we are killing ourselves!’ (Letter 78, from *The Letters of Saint Catherine of Siena*, Suzanne Noffke OP, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 1988, Vol.1, pp.238-239)

‘A soul cannot live without loving. It must have something to love, for it was created to love.’

‘The soul is in God and God is in the soul as the fish is in the sea and the sea in the fish.’

‘Foolish, proud and learned people.... read the Scriptures literally, not with understanding, and they have lost the light by which the Scriptures were formed and proclaimed.’

‘You [God], are a fire that takes away the cold, enlightens the mind with its truth, and enables me to know the truth. And I know that you are beauty and truth and wisdom itself.’

‘I [God], love you more than you love yourself, and I watch over you a thousand times more carefully than you can watch over yourself.’

And one of her prayers: -

‘Grant, eternal Father, the prayer of those who stand at the door of your truth and pray. For you could not refuse it to anyone who truly seeks it.’

## POPE SAINT PIUS V: 30 April

Anthony Ghislieri was born at Bosco Marengo, Lombardy, Italy, in 1504. At the age of fourteen he entered the Dominican Order, taking the name of Michael. Ordained at twenty-four, he spent sixteen years lecturing in theology. He reacted strongly against moral laxity in the church and asked to be appointed inquisitor. His zeal evoked resentment, and, in 1550, he had to leave for Rome. There he was promoted in the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office and of the Inquisition (now known as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith).

History knows two principal Inquisitions, the Roman and the Spanish. The latter was under the control of the king and primarily had a political purpose, namely, that of removing from Spain anyone considered not to be sufficiently Spanish. The Venetian ambassador to Spain wrote,

It is fair to say that the real master of the Holy Office is the King. He personally appoints the Inquisitors. He uses this tribunal to control his subjects, and to chastise them with his characteristic secrecy and severity. The Inquisition and the Royal Council are always in step and constantly assist one another. (Cited by Henri Daniel-Rops, *The Catholic Reformation*, trans. by John Warrington, London, 1963, p.155)

It focused on Muslims, Jews and heretics. To cite an analogy from Saint Thomas Aquinas, a heretic was regarded by the state as being like a currency forger, but one who “forged” something more important, the spiritual and cultural foundation of society, and who was therefore seen as a threat to national unity. (*Summa Theologiae*, II, II, ques. 11, art. 3) The Roman Inquisition operated according to laws and procedures which were moderate by the standards of its time, barbaric by standards of democratic societies today, and inadmissible by the standards of the Gospel.

Pope Paul IV made Michael bishop and cardinal and gave him the unique title of Supreme Inquisitor. But Paul died in 1559 and was succeeded by Pius IV. Michael criticized Pius face to face for wanting to make a thirteen year old nephew a cardinal, and for subsidizing another nephew from the papal treasury. (Some historians say that “nephew” was occasionally a euphemism for son.) This resulted in his transfer to a diocese far from Rome and a reduction in his powers as inquisitor. But Pius IV died in 1565, and Michael, with support from Charles Borromeo, then a cardinal, (ironically, another nephew of Pius IV, but a good one!) was elected pope as Pius V in 1566.

A major concern of his was to restore discipline in the church and papal states, and the Inquisition was the principal means he used. He reduced the cost of the papal court, and required clergy to live in their places of appointment. In the liturgy, in 1570, he revised the text and rubrics of the Mass in a form which remained

substantially unchanged until the revision by Paul VI in 1969. Likewise, in 1568, he reformed the breviary, that is, the prayer book based largely on the psalms used by priests and religious, and ordered its daily recitation. He standardized liturgical texts for the Roman rite, encouraged the music of Palestrina, and promoted the use of the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*. He held three regional synods of bishops in Italy to promote reform, and declared Saint Thomas Aquinas a doctor of the church. The reference point for his ministry was the Council of Trent, and he sought to have bishops and priests everywhere implement its decrees rigorously.

In the papal states, that large part of central Italy then ruled by the pope as its civil head, he regulated inns, sought to drive out prostitutes, introduced the death penalty for adultery, and expelled Jews from most of the territory. He ordered the construction of a new water supply and sewage disposal system for Rome.

Pius had an exalted conception of the papacy; in his earlier days, he had advanced thirty theological propositions in its support and fought against limitations to it.

His attitude towards Protestants was uncompromising: he declared null and void a decree by the French king allowing Protestants to exercise their faith publicly and opposed royal concessions to the Huguenot nobility.

When Elizabeth I became queen of England in 1558 and Supreme Governor of the Church of England, Pius

supported her rival, Mary, Queen of Scots, and encouraged Spain to invade England, which it attempted to do in the *Armada* of 1588. There was a short-lived uprising by Catholics in the north of England against Elizabeth, which she easily crushed; she also imprisoned and later executed Mary. Pius responded in 1570 by excommunicating her and releasing Catholics from their allegiance to her. The effect was to strengthen Elizabeth's place in public esteem, and put English Catholics, however loyal to their country, in the position of being seen as traitors. Elizabeth, who had previously tolerated the private practice of the Catholic faith, began to persecute Catholics vigorously. One historian said of Pius' action that it hard-wired anti-Catholicism into the English psyche.

Pius was active in organizing the Holy League of Catholic states – principally Venice, Spain and the papal states - and a naval fleet to oppose the Ottoman Turks who were threatening Europe. He offered plenary indulgences to raise money for the purpose. In a naval battle fought at Lepanto on 7 October 1571, the Catholic fleet, under Don John of Austria, won a decisive victory. Even Queen Elizabeth rejoiced, ordering church bells rung in celebration. It was said that Pius knew of the victory days before word reached Rome about it.

Pius died on 1 May 1572 and was canonized in 1712. He is patron saint of Malta because of his defeat of the Turks who had threatened the island and of his financial support for its fortification. The white Dominican habit he wore led to the custom of popes dressing in white.

Pius, a reforming pope, is a good illustration of the risks and ambiguity associated with this role. There were several others, such as those in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They are associated inextricably with inquisitions, crusades and the use of violence in the name of the Gospel. John Main OSB offers a useful insight: -

Religious people have so often pretended to have all the answers. They have seen their mission as being to persuade, to enforce, to level differences and perhaps even to impose uniformity. There is really something of the Grand Inquisitor in most religious people. But when religion begins to bully or to insinuate, it has become unspiritual because the first gift of the Spirit, creatively moving in man's nature, is freedom and frankness; in Biblical language, liberty and truth. The modern Christian's mission is to resensitize his contemporaries to the presence of a spirit within themselves. He is not a teacher in the sense that he is providing answers that he has looked up in the back of a book. He is truly a teacher when, having found his own spirit, he can inspire others to accept the responsibility of their own being, to undergo the challenge of their own innate longing for the Absolute, to find their own spirit. (*The Inner Christ*, DLT, London, 1994, p.38)



## **SAINT JOSEPH THE WORKER: 1 MAY**

See 19 March.

## SAINT ATHANASIUS: 2 May

Athanasius was born in or near Alexandria, Egypt, about 295-298. His family were Christian, and his parents taught him the faith. Alexandria was then the intellectual centre of the Mediterranean. Athanasius was well educated, even though mostly self-taught. In his earliest writings, he quoted freely from philosophers of antiquity. His later writings often had a polemical character which took priority over theological exposition. He wrote in Greek and Coptic, but didn't know Hebrew.

When he was about twenty-seven, he played a large part in the Council of Nicaea in 325, presenting orthodox teaching on the divinity of Jesus, in particular against Arianism. 'Jesus whom I know as my Redeemer cannot be less than God,' he said at that council, and,

It is proper to the Son to have all that the Father has, and to be such that the Father is beheld in him, and that through him all things were made and that in him the salvation of all is brought about and established. (*Against the Arians*, 2.24)

It was said of him at a later stage that, 'The final triumph of the Nicene faith, and its ratification at the council of Constantinople in 381, is due to Athanasius more than to any other man.' (Henry Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers*, Oxford, 1978, p.26) He became

secretary to the bishop of Alexandria, and succeeded him at (or possibly below) the canonical age of thirty.

Athanasius spent the first years of his patriarchate visiting his diocese, which covered Egypt and Libya. He established contact with the hermits and monks of the desert (Skete), and this would be valuable to him in later years. Shortly after becoming bishop, he became immersed in disputes with the Byzantine Empire and Arians, whose understanding of the nature of the divinity of Christ was not orthodox. A great deal of his time and energy were taken up in disputes about this. Other issues became inter-twined, such as political rivalry between the Roman emperors of the East and the West, issues of language and culture, and personal ambition and ego. He was exiled five times by various emperors, but maintained contact with people by letter; from this he came to have the nickname of “the invisible patriarch.”

Athanasius was accused of threatening to interfere with the grain supply from Egypt to Rome, and, without trial, was exiled by Emperor Constantine to Trier in Germany. At one time the emperor ordered that, if he returned home, he should be executed. A later emperor allowed his return, and he was welcomed by most Egyptians as a national hero, (This was before Islam; most Egyptians were Christian.) But he still could not resume office as bishop. He spent much time in monasteries, engaged in writing, mostly about current controversies. He became friends with prominent monks, such as Saint Anthony of Egypt, Pachomius and Serapion. He supported monastic

life, and the monks, in turn, supported him in his difficulties.

He was allowed by Emperor Valens to return to his diocese in 366. He spent his remaining years in re-emphasizing the teaching on the Incarnation defined at Nicaea in 325. On 2 May 373, he died quietly at home. He had been bishop for forty-five years, of which seventeen were spent in exile.

His earliest writing, *On the Incarnation*, he completed when he was about twenty years old. It has been described as the first classic work of developed orthodox theology. In it he wrote, 'God became man that man might become God; God revealed himself visibly [in Jesus] that we might see the invisible God,' (54.3) and, 'When he [Christ] commends his spirit into the hands of the Father, he commends himself as man to God in order to commend all men to God.' (n.12) (Interestingly, Saint Augustine, in *Sermon 13 on the Nativity of the Lord*, also used the phrase, 'God became man that man might become God,' perhaps borrowing from Athanasius, who preceded him.)

Athanasius also promoted the divinity of the Holy Spirit in his *Letters to Serapion* of Thmuis.

He wrote a *Life of Saint Anthony* which played an important part in spreading the ascetic ideal in the East and West. In 367, he wrote a letter which is the first known canon of the books and letters of the New Testament. He wrote on scripture, the divinity of the

Holy Spirit, the ascetical life, and the controversies of his time. He is not the author of the creed known as the Athanasian Creed; it came from Galicia, Spain, in the fifth century. He was not a speculative theologian, saying that he held on to ‘the tradition, teaching, and faith proclaimed by the apostles and guarded by the fathers.’

There are two opposed views about Athanasius. Some praise him as an orthodox saint of great character, while others see him as a power-hungry politician. His becoming bishop in Alexandria occurred under questionable circumstances. According to recent studies, he gathered a small number of bishops who supported his claim, and they consecrated him privately before he had reached the canonical age of thirty. Throughout most of his life, Athanasius had many detractors. He was accused of inventing dialogues to ridicule his adversaries, and of suppressing and distorting truth to serve his own ends. There were allegations that he sold for personal gain grain meant to feed the poor, of using force when it suited his interests, and of suppressing dissent through violence and even murder, as when a mob lynched George of Cappadocia, a former bishop of Alexandria who was an Arian. He often blamed accusations levelled at him on what he called ‘Arian madmen’ whom he claimed conspired to destroy him and Christianity. It is said, too, that he used the term ‘Arian’ for anyone, of whatever theological opinion, who opposed him. The “Arian party,” as described by Athanasius, may not have existed in the form he portrayed in his writings. Some argue that the view of

Arianism that persists to this day among most Christians would not have existed were it not for Athanasius. However, it cannot be said beyond doubt that all or any of these allegations is true.

Some historians object to the above, and say that it is based on an unfair reading of the historical sources. Others point to the Council of Nicaea as proof that Arianism was a real theological threat. Athanasius is counted as one of the great doctors (teachers) of the church in both West and East, where he is called the Father of Orthodoxy. He is honoured by Protestants too, who call him Father of the Canon (of Scripture).

It was said of him that, 'By his tenacity and vision in preaching one God and Saviour he had preserved from dissolution the unity and integrity of the Christian faith.' (G.L., Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics*, 1940, p.76)

## **SAINTS PHILIP and JAMES: 3 May**

### **Philip**

Philip came from Bethsaida in Galilee, the same town as Peter and Andrew, and was a disciple of John the Baptist. Jesus called him, and he then sought out Nathanael and told him of ‘the one Moses wrote about.’ (John 1.45) Like the other apostles, he, understandably, took a long time to realize who Jesus was. He challenged Nathaniel in his scepticism about Nazareth, saying to him, ‘Come and see.’ (John 1.46) On one occasion, when Jesus saw a crowd following him and wanted to give them food, he asked Philip where they could buy bread for the people to eat. John’s Gospel states, ‘[Jesus] said this to test him; he himself knew just what he was going to do.’ (6.6) Philip answered, ‘Two hundred days’ wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little.’ (6.7) Perhaps this was part of a process by which Jesus led Philip and the other disciples to come to know who he was.

On another occasion, we can hear irritation in Jesus’ voice. After Thomas had complained that they did not know where he was going, Jesus said, ‘I am the way... If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’ Then Philip said, ‘Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.’ Jesus answered, ‘Have I been with you for so long a time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.’ (See John 14.6-9)

Possibly because Philip's name was Greek, or because he was thought to be close to Jesus, some Gentile converts came to him and asked him to introduce them to Jesus. Philip went to Andrew, and Andrew went to Jesus. (John 12.20-22) Jesus' reply in John's Gospel is indirect: he said that his "hour" had come, and that in a short time he would give his life for Jew and Gentile alike.

Philip is said to have died a martyr's death by crucifixion under the emperor, Domitian, about 80 AD, aged eighty-five. In recent years, a tomb, said to be his, has been discovered at Hierapolis in Phrygia, near the town of Pannukkale in modern Turkey.

## **James**

There are three Jameses in the Gospel: James 'the brother of the Lord' (Mark 6.3), James the Greater, older brother of Saint John, both sons of Zebedee (Mark 3.17), and this man, 'the Less' or 'the Younger' (Mark 15.40). He was the son of a man called Alphaeus, and Jesus chose him to be an apostle. (Matthew 10.3 = Mark 3.18 = Luke 6.15 = Acts 1.13)

Nothing more than the above is known of his life from reliable sources.

He is not regarded as the author of the New Testament Letter ascribed to a James, that honour generally being given to James, the brother of the Lord.



## **SAINT PANCRAS: 12 May**

Pancras was born about 289 AD to pagan Roman parents living in Phrygia, in modern Turkey. His mother died in childbirth, and his father when he was eight years old. He was given into the care of an uncle, and they went to live in Rome, where both became Christians.

During the persecution by Emperor Diocletian, about 303, Pancras was asked to sacrifice to the Roman gods. He refused, and remained steadfast in doing so, despite offers of money and position if he cooperated. Consequently, he was beheaded on the Via Aurelia on 12 May 303 or 304, at the age of fourteen.

His body was recovered and buried in one of the catacombs, but his head was enshrined in the basilica of Saint Pancras where it still is today. His cult existed from the fifth century, if not earlier. Pope Gregory I gave some of his relics to Saint Augustine of Canterbury in 597 for his mission to England. Many churches there, and even a railway station in London, bear his name. He is one of the patrons of children.

## **SAINTS NEREUS and ACHILLEUS: 12 May**

In the first three centuries of the Christian era, the church suffered under the Roman Empire. But it grew anyway. At a time when the empire had lost faith in itself, was suffering military losses to foreign attack, and seemed unable to have imperial succession without civil war, the Christian community was strong, united, purposeful, determined and popular. It had qualities the empire had once prided itself on but had lost. Emperor Constantine adopted a new policy which was as simple as, 'If you can't beat the Christians, co-opt them.' With the publication of the Edict of Milan in 313, he lifted the prohibition on the Christian faith. The empire bestowed favours on Christian clergy - but at a price. Emperor Theodosius, in 380, made Christianity the state religion. In 381, he prohibited the practice of any pagan religion, even in private, and, among other repressive measures, authorized Christians to demolish pagan temples. In just seventy years, the persecuted church had become a persecuting church. The subtle seduction of the power game was not recognized as temptation, except by monks and hermits; instead it was embraced as an opportunity. The Christian community seemed to have forgotten Matthew 4.1-11, where Jesus rejected power, position and possessions as temptations.

The church became the spiritual successor of the empire, even though the values of the empire of Rome were often in opposition to those of the kingdom of God. It adopted the empire's organizational structure and still

has it today. Popes even use the title of the emperor in his role as pagan priest, *Pontifex Maximus*. At the level of doctrine also, the church accommodated itself to, and even adopted, imperial attitudes, in regard, for example, to slavery and military service. While early Christians had rejected military service out of fidelity to the teaching of Jesus, those in the post-Constantinian period held that military service was a moral obligation, except for the clergy.

The martyrdom of Nereus and Achilleus takes place against that background. They were soldiers in the Roman army. When they converted to Christianity, they refused to serve in it any longer. This could have been because military service involved the likelihood of being ordered to kill, or because it involved offering incense to the emperor, with its recognition of his status as a god. (An alternative version of their lives is that they were servants in the household of a niece of Emperor Domitian.) There is no certainty as to the date of their execution, which was by decapitation, but it may have been about 304.

## **SAINT MATTHIAS, APOSTLE: 14 May**

According to the Acts of the Apostles (1.15-17, 20-26), Matthias was the man chosen by the remaining eleven apostles to replace Judas following his betrayal of Jesus and then his suicide (Matthew 27.3-10). In the Gospels, the apostles form a distinct group known as ‘the twelve.’ After Judas’ death, they became known as ‘the eleven.’ (See Matthew 28.16; Mark 16.14; Luke 24.9, 33) They reverted to the original when Matthias replaced Judas: ‘they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was added to the eleven apostles.’ (Acts 1.26)

Matthias’ calling as an apostle is unique in that it was not made personally by Jesus, who had already ascended to heaven. It was made before the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles. But, like the other apostles, he was a witness to the resurrection of Jesus. No one, of course, as the Gospels make clear, actually saw Jesus rise from the tomb; people saw him after he had risen.

Why was such importance attached to the apostles being witnesses to the resurrection? Because, if Jesus is risen, that is the joy of all joys, the hope of all hopes. It is the foundation of the hope of believers that they who have shared on earth in Jesus’ life through faith will also share in his risen, glorious life. Saint Paul said, ‘if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.’ (1 Corinthians 15.14, 19)

There is no reliable information about Matthias' later life. There are many traditions, often conflicting, which a scripture scholar, John L. McKenzie, describes as 'historically worthless.' But his death as a martyr is widely attested.

## **SAINT PASCHAL BAYLON: 17 May**

Paschal Baylon was born in Spain on the borders of Castile and Aragon on 24 May 1540. Pascua is the Spanish for Easter; hence he was given the name Paschal. His parents were farmers, and he spent his youth as a shepherd. He would carry a book with him and ask passers-by to teach him to read. As he worked in the fields he would read religious books.

About 1564, he joined the Alcantrine branch of the Franciscans, saying, 'I was born poor and am resolved to die poor and in penance.' He lived simply, praying while working, for the rest of his life. Though not a priest, he preached missions, and, on one such occasion, in France, he was threatened with death by Calvinists.

He was a contemplative, and had frequent ecstatic visions. He would often spend the night before the altar in prayer. But he played down any attention that came from his piety. One of his sayings was, 'God is to be sought above everything.' He died on 15 May 1592.

Pope Leo XIII proclaimed him the saint of the Eucharist, and patron of eucharistic congresses. Christian art often depicts him bearing a monstrance, signifying his devotion to the Eucharist.

## **POPE SAINT JOHN I: 18 May**

John was a native of Siena, Italy, and was born about 470. He became one of the seven deacons of the church of Rome. In that capacity, he was a signatory to the *Acts* of the Roman synod held in 499 and 502. He supported the antipope Laurentius, but, in a letter to Pope Symmachus, written in 506, he apologized, and asked for forgiveness.

John was ordained bishop of Rome as Pope John I on 13 August 523, at a time when his health was frail. The Arian controversy was a burning issue in the church at the time and a source of great division. The Arian king of the Ostrogoths, Theodoric the Great, who had his capital at Ravenna in the north of Italy, sent John, against his will, to Emperor Justin at Constantinople, as his ambassador. In 523, Justin had published an edict of persecution against Arians in Italy, and Theodoric wanted it moderated. He told John that, if he failed in his mission, he would take reprisals against Catholics in the West.

Justin received John well and acceded to his requests. But John would not ask that Arians who had been forced to convert to Catholicism be free to return to Arianism. While in Constantinople, he crowned Justin emperor.

Although John was successful in his unusual mission, Theodoric had him arrested on his return to Ravenna. He suspected him of conspiring with Justin against him.

John was imprisoned, and died on 18 May 526 of neglect and ill treatment. His body was brought to Rome and buried in Saint Peter's basilica.



## **SAINT BERNARDINE of SIENA: 20 May**

Bernardine was born on 8 September 1380 to a noble family in Tuscany, in a town of which his father was governor. Orphaned by the age of six, he was raised by an aunt. After finishing school, he went on to university where he studied law, while also caring for the sick in hospitals. There was an outbreak of bubonic plague in 1400, and he contracted it, but survived.

He joined the Franciscans at the age of twenty-three. Remarkably, he was ordained the following year. He then began a career as a preacher which lasted until his death forty years later. He preached all over Italy, and enormous crowds came to hear him, as many as thirty thousand, it was said, on some occasions, while those going to him for confession were so numerous they were described as being ‘like ants.’ He acquired a reputation as a reconciler of people divided by feuds, among them the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. He did not confine his preaching to churches, but went into town squares and the open road with his message. It was not uncommon for him to preach for anything from one to four hours. Despite his long experience as a preacher, he still spent hours preparing each sermon, and re-wrote them often. In addition to sermons he also wrote several works of systematic theology. Like the later Savonarola, he used to hold “bonfires of vanities” at which people burned items considered to be sources of temptation, such as jewellery or ornate clothing.

Three groups of people especially incurred his anger – homosexuals, Jews and witches. In the church of Santa Croce in Siena, in Lent of 1424, he urged people to show their detestation of homosexuality by spitting vigorously on the floor, while saying, ‘To the fire! Burn all the sodomites!’ (Al fuoco! ‘Bruciate tutti i sodomiti!’ Quoted by Charles Nicholl, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Flights of the Mind*, Penguin, London, 2005, p.117) He told the congregation that, in Venice, one homosexual - he used the term sodomite – had been quartered and his limbs hung from the city gates, while another had been tied to a pole along with a barrel of pitch and brushwood and set on fire; in Genoa, male homosexuals were regularly burned. He urged the people of Siena to do the same. Everything unpredictable or calamitous in his experience, from floods to plague, he attributed to sodomy.

Bernardine called for Jews to be isolated from the communities where they lived, blaming them for the poverty of Catholics. His hearers sometimes used his words as justification for attacks on Jews.

A particular focus of his preaching was the Holy Name of Jesus, and he used the IHS Christogram to illustrate this. (IHS is an abbreviation for IĒSOUS, the Greek for Jesus.) He used to say, ‘Everything that God has done for the salvation of the world lies hidden in the name of Jesus.’

Ironically, more than once he was called to Rome to stand trial on charges of heresy for preaching this

devotion, as it was considered a potential source of idolatry. He was also put on trial at the Council of Basel but was acquitted. Defended by Saint John of Capestrano, he was acquitted by Popes Martin V and Eugene IV, and then invited by Martin to stay and preach. He remained in Rome for eighty days, preaching each day. At different times, he was invited to become bishop of various dioceses, but declined as he wished to continue preaching. In 1431, he intervened to prevent war between Siena and Florence.

Saint John of Capestrano was his friend and Saint James of the Marches his follower during those years. Emperor Sigismund of the Holy Roman Empire sought his advice and Bernardine accompanied the emperor to Rome in 1433 for his coronation.

In 1436, Bernardine became vicar-general of the Observant branch of the Franciscans in Italy in 1438. From the outset of his religious life he had worked to promote the Observants. When he joined this branch it had only a hundred and thirty friars; by the time of his death, it had four thousand. It is said that he reformed three hundred friaries. He also sent missionaries to Asia, and is credited with helping to ensure that ambassadors from different schismatic nations attended the Council of Florence. He resigned as vicar-general of the order after six years so that he could return to preaching. Pope Eugene IV asked him to preach the indulgence for a crusade against the Turks in 1443, but it seems he did not do so. Even though by then his health was in decline, he set out for the kingdom of Naples to preach there, but

died in the city of L'Aquila in the Abruzzi on 20 May 1444. Reports of miracles attributed to him multiplied after his death, and he was canonized only six years later. He is perhaps the first saint to have had realistic portraits of him in circulation, as the earliest forms of printing had just been developed; these show him as small and emaciated. He is the patron of advertising and communications.

The following is from one of his sermons on the name of Jesus: -

Glorious name! Beautiful name! Name that tells of love and excellence! Through you we have forgiveness of our sins, victory over our enemies, healing in sickness, strength and joy as we suffer the trials of life. You are recompense to the person of faith, learning to the preacher, strength to the worker, perseverance to the weak. In the furnace of your burning love our desires are enkindled, our prayers are granted, contemplative souls are entranced. Through you all who are glorified come in triumph to everlasting glory. Most merciful Jesus, grant through your most holy name that we too may be numbered amongst those who share your kingdom. (From Sermon 49, art. 1, *On the Eternal Gospel*, in his *Collected Works*, IV)

Bernardine urged husbands not to demand of their wives what they themselves were not prepared to do: -

How would you like this wife of yours to be? You say, 'I want her not to be greedy.' But you are always eating.

You say, 'I'd like her to be a hard worker.' But you do nothing yourself.

You say, 'I'd like her to be peaceful.' But you lose your temper if a straw brushes against your shoe.

You say, 'I'd like her to be obedient.' But you obey neither your father nor your mother nor anyone. You don't deserve her.

You say, 'I want a wife who is good and attractive and wise and well brought up.' If you want her to be like this, then you must be the same yourself.

One of his prayers was, 'Lord Jesus, acknowledge what is yours in us, and take away from us all that is not yours; for your honour and glory. Amen.'

#### Sources

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Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilisation*, Harvard University, 2003.

## **SAINT CRISTÓBAL MAGALLANES JARA and COMPANIONS: 21 May**

Cristóbal Magallanes Jara was born in Totatiche, Jalisco, Mexico, on 30 July 1869. His parents, Rafael Magallanes and Clara Jara, were farmers. As a boy he worked on the family farm as a shepherd.

At the age of nineteen, he entered the seminary of San José in Guadalajara. Ordained at the age of thirty, he was appointed chaplain to a school in the city. He was later appointed parish priest in his home town of Totatiche, where he helped found schools and carpentry shops, and in the planning of hydrological works, including a dam. He took a special interest in the evangelization of the local indigenous Huichol people, and was instrumental in the foundation of a mission in the indigenous town of Azqueltán.

In 1910, a new government describing itself as liberal and socialist took power, drawing substantially on the support of landless peasants. In power, however, it first abandoned, and then suppressed the peasants, turning instead for support to wealthy urban elites. A new constitution, promulgated in 1917, prohibited the public profession of religion, including religious instruction, even in churches, and regulated the number of priests allowed to function. These latter restrictions were so severe that in some states of the Mexican Federation, such as Chihuahua, no priests at all were allowed to serve. Church property, such as schools and churches

were confiscated. Any priest who criticized the president was liable to five years' imprisonment.

President Plutarch Calles in particular adopted a severely anti-religious attitude. He was an atheist, a freemason, and was partly financed by the Ku Klux Klan. He undertook severe repression of the church, including public torture and execution without trial of priests, of whom about forty were killed, among many other people. Their bodies were left on display in towns until the people collectively pledged themselves to make no further public profession of faith.

These measures led first to passive resistance, then to calls, expressed through the political system, for land reform, social justice, and religious freedom. Finally, when those efforts came to nothing, it led to active guerrilla warfare which lasted for three years and resulted in the loss of 90,000 lives. The guerrillas used the slogan 'Long live Christ the King!' (Viva Cristo Rey!) – hence the name Cristero rebellion. The church had urged people to confine their protests to peaceful methods, but the struggle became violent and some priests became actively involved as guerrillas.

In 1926, the Catholic bishops suspended all public worship in protest at government policy. They hoped this would arouse people to demand change from the government. It was a strange form of protest as it could be said that it was doing the government's job for it. But the suspension (officially called an interdict), though supported by Pope Pius XI, backfired and resulted in

large numbers of people losing contact with the faith, so it was called off after two years.

A peace agreement was mediated by the US ambassador in 1929. But, despite this, repression continued, if not with the same severity, so that, by 1935, seventeen states of the Mexican Federation had no priests at all, and the total number in the country had been reduced from 4,500 in 1926 to 334 in 1934, serving 15 million people, a ratio of, on average, one priest for every 45,000 people. (Graham Greene's novel *The Power and the Glory* is set in Mexico in this period.)

In 1914, Cristóbal's former seminary of San José, Guadalajara, was shut on the orders of the government, so he opened a small one in his own parish. This was recognized by the bishop who sent some staff there. Cristóbal preached and wrote against armed rebellion, but nonetheless was accused of promoting the Cristero rebellion. On 21 May 1927, while en route to celebrate Mass at a farm, he was arrested. He gave his possessions to his captors and told them he forgave them. Four days later, without a trial, he was executed along with Saint Agustín Caloca in Colotlán, Jalisco. His last words to his executioners were, 'I die innocent, and ask God that my blood may serve to unite my Mexican brothers and sisters.'

He was canonized by Pope John Paul II on 21 May 2000.



The twentieth century saw more Christian martyrs than any other, and some of the most savage persecutions were in countries which were, or had been, Christian, such as Russia, Spain and Mexico. For example: -

The former Soviet Union was the most repressive of all regimes in its attitude towards the Christian faith: - ‘

Historians estimate that 35 million Soviet and East European citizens died at Communist hands - including half of the 260,000 priests and 250 of the 300 bishops belonging to Russia's Orthodox Moscow Patriarchate alone. (Jonathan Luxmore, "The Quiet Saints of the Gulag", *The Tablet*, 27 May 2000, p.708)

Not all of those 35 million were Christians, and those who were did not all die because of hatred of the faith. But it is worth bearing in mind what Pope John Paul II wrote: -

This glory [of martyrdom] must be acknowledged not only in the martyrs for the faith but in many others also who, at times, even without belief in Christ, suffer and give their lives for the truth and for a just cause. In the sufferings of all of these people the great dignity of the person is strikingly confirmed. (From his apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris*, 11 February 1984, on the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering, n.22)

During the civil war in Spain from 1936 to 1939, 13 bishops, 4,184 diocesan priests, 2,365 male religious and 283 nuns died for the faith. This figure was quoted by Pope John Paul II during a ceremony in Rome during which he declared 233 of them Blessed. (See *The Tablet*, 17 March 2001, p. 389)

In World War II, about 2,000 Catholic priests died in Dachau concentration camp near Munich in the south of Germany. And Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister for Propaganda and a former Catholic, said in 1941, when it looked as if Germany would win the war, that, when the war was over, one major task which remained for Germany was the destruction of the Catholic Church.

Between 1994 and 1998, 499 Catholic priests, religious brothers and sisters were murdered in various countries around the world. (*Mondo e Missione*, quoted in *The Far East*, May/June 1999)

For more information, read Robert Royal, *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century: a comprehensive world history*, Crossroad Publishing Company, USA, 2000.

## **SAINT RITA OF CASCIA: 22 May**

According to tradition, Saint Rita was born as Margarita in Umbria, Italy, about 1381 (or 1377). Her parents, Antonio Lotti and Amata Ferri, were described as devout. They married Rita off to a local man while she was still a child. Her husband, Paolo Mancini, was rich, aggressive, lustful, and had many enemies. Rita's own desire had been to enter a convent, but instead she had her first child at the age of twelve.

For years, her husband abused and insulted her while having many affairs with other women. She had two sons by him, Giovanni and Paolo. By her good example, she persuaded him to give up a vendetta which had existed between his family and another. But, in the eighteenth year of their marriage, he was stabbed to death by one of the other family.

Although Rita publicly pardoned her husband's killer, her brother-in-law, Bernardo, wanted to continue the feud. Despite her best efforts, he gradually won her sons away from her and they pledged themselves to revenge. But they both died of dysentery the following year. People saw this as God taking them from the danger of losing their souls through murder.

After the deaths of her husband and sons, Rita asked to enter the Augustinian convent at Cascia, but was refused. It seems the nuns were afraid of being associated with her due to her husband's violent death. When she

persisted, they promised to admit her if she first reconciled the two families.

Bubonic plague was sweeping through Italy at the time, and Bernardo was infected by it. Fear of death persuaded him to forgo any further thought of revenge. And so, at the age of thirty-six, Rita was admitted. She became known for her penance and for the effectiveness of her prayers. One day, when she was about sixty, she was meditating before an image of Christ crucified, when a small wound appeared on her forehead, as though a thorn from Christ's crown of thorns had loosened itself and penetrated her skull. For the next fifteen years she bore this stigma as a sign of her union with the Lord.

A story is told that, near the end of her life, Rita was confined to bed at the convent. A cousin visited her and asked if she wanted anything from her old home. She asked for a rose from the garden. It was January, and her cousin did not expect to find roses at that time of year. But when she went to the house, she found a rose in bloom and brought it to the convent. So Rita is often depicted holding roses, or with roses nearby.

Rita died on 22 May 1457 at the age of seventy-six. She was canonized by Pope Leo XIII in 1900. She has the reputation, together with Saint Jude, as the patron saint of impossible cases. Her intercession is especially sought by abused women. Her body, which has remained incorrupt over the centuries, is venerated today in her shrine at Cascia. The sanctuary and the house where she

was born are among the most visited places of pilgrimage in Umbria. She exemplified the teaching of Saint Paul, 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good.' (Romans 12.21)

## **SAINT BEDE the VENERABLE: 25 May**

Bede was born about 672-3 to a prosperous family near Newcastle in England. His name probably derives from the Old English *bēd*, meaning prayer, and it may mean that he was designated from birth by his family for monastic life. He went to a monastery at Wearmouth in Northumbria as an oblate at the age of seven. Along with just one other monk, Ceolfrid, he survived an outbreak of plague there – the Yellow Death - when he was about fourteen. He was ordained priest at thirty. Apart from short periods in Lindisfarne and York, he lived at Jarrow from 682 till his death over fifty years later.

He began writing at about 682, and, in his life, wrote some sixty books, most of which have survived. He became a teacher, but was accused of heresy by his fellow monks because he questioned the authority of Saint Isidore of Seville – for example, was Jesus born 3952 years (Bede) after the creation of the world or was it 5000 years (Isidore)? Bede dismissed his critics as “lewd rustics” and said they were drunk.

He is principally known as a historian because of his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, completed in 731, a work written in a warm, homely style, in which he tried to promote the unity of the British peoples of his time. His omission from it of any mention of Saint Boniface is surprising, especially as Boniface had used some of Bede’s homilies in his missionary work. He has been described as ‘the first and greatest of England’s

historians.’ (Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1999, p.29) He also wrote biblical commentaries, a Latin dictionary, works on the calculation of the date of Easter according to the usage adopted at the Synod of Whitby in 664, theology, sermons, music, rhetoric, poetry, grammar, astronomy, orthography, translations and biographies. Among the latter were two of Saint Cuthbert, one in prose, the other in verse; they established the cult of the saint throughout Europe. Bede’s work with the Latin and Greek writings of the early Church Fathers contributed significantly to English Christianity, making their writings more accessible to his fellow Anglo-Saxons. He was not an original thinker, but synthesised what he learned from others, especially the theology of the Church Fathers. A particular characteristic of his writing was its clarity.

Bede, known as ‘the Venerable,’ died on Ascension Thursday, 26 May 735, having first distributed what he called his ‘few treasures’ – pepper, napkins and incense. As he was dying, he said, ‘I do not fear to die because we have a loving Lord. My soul desires to see Christ my king in his beauty.’ His cult was promoted on the continent by Saint Boniface, who was his fervent follower. He was never formally canonized, but was venerated from the ninth century. In 1899, he was declared a Doctor of the Church for his theological writings, the only Englishman to be given this title.

Bede wrote: -

With integrity of mind, firm faith, undaunted courage, thoroughgoing love, let us be ready for whatever God's will brings. Let us keep his commandments faithfully, and be innocent in our simplicity, peaceable in love, modest in humility, diligent in our service, merciful in assisting the poor, firm in standing for the truth and strict in our keeping of discipline.



## POPE SAINT GREGORY VII: 25 May

Part of the background to Gregory and his time were that Otto the Great, who became Holy Roman Emperor in 962, deposed one pope and appointed another, and laid down that no one could become pope without his approval. One of his successors, Henry III (1039-1056), set aside three claimants to the papacy and installed his own man, a German, like himself. The papacy was in danger of becoming simply the ecclesiastical branch of the empire. (Hutton Webster, *Early European History*, Part II, pp.456-459) Another element was the prolonged effort, over many centuries and countless wars, by the Holy Roman Emperors to control northern Italy, seeing it as part of their domains.

Hildebrand Bonizi, the son of a blacksmith, was born in Tuscany, Italy, about 1015. As a youth he studied in Rome, where an uncle may have been abbot of a monastery on the Aventine Hill, and also spent time at Cluny, in France. He was described as small, ungainly in appearance, and with a weak voice, but energetic, forceful and with an imperious will. (Webster, *op. cit.*, p.458) Among his teachers was the future Pope Gregory VI. When Gregory was declared deposed by the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry III, and exiled to Germany, Hildebrand followed him there. He later accompanied an Abbot Bruno of Toul to Rome. There, Bruno was elected pope, choosing the name Leo IX, and named Hildebrand as deacon and papal administrator.

Leo sent Hildebrand as his legate to France and Germany on various missions. Leo's successors, Victor II and Stephen IX, also gave him similar tasks. These were mostly related to gaining political support for the pope at a time when aristocratic Roman families were intent on choosing their candidate for the papacy. Indeed, Stephen was the first pope to have been elected by the clergy of Rome since Paschal I in 817, some 240 years earlier. The aristocracy had chosen their candidate, Benedict X, but, with the help of three hundred Norman knights, Hildebrand personally led the capture of the castle where he was staying and deposed him.

Then, about 1058, Hildebrand was chosen as archdeacon of the Roman church, the most important figure in the papal administration. He was influential in bringing about the election of Pope Alexander II in 1061 with a plan of reform, the centrepiece of which was freeing the church from control by local rulers, or lay investiture, as it has been called. Hildebrand was instrumental in introducing a law whereby the cardinals – a new office at the time – would be the sole electors of a lawful pope.

In April 1073, when Alexander died and the funeral was being conducted, priests and people together called out, 'Let Hildebrand be pope!' On the same day, he was elected by the cardinals amid public acclamation, and took the name of Gregory VII.

The manner of his election evoked the accusation that the public acclamation had been pre-arranged by

Gregory, and that he used methods similar to those he decried in his campaigns for reform. Was that sour grapes, or a valid point? From Gregory's own account, it seems clear that the election was irregular and did not comply with the reforming laws of 1059. The end in view - reform - was not pre-figured in the means; this was to come back and haunt Gregory later.

What turned the tide in Gregory's favour was his popularity with the people. In this sense, his election recalled the practice of the earliest centuries of the church of Rome. But, having been elected pope, he had first to be ordained priest and then bishop, having been simply a deacon. This was done in May 1073.

Gregory believed that the church was founded by God with the task of bringing all mankind into a single society in which God's will was the law; and that, being a divine institution, the church is supreme over all human structures, especially the secular state; and that the pope, as head of the church, is the vice-regent of God on earth, so that disobedience to him implies disobedience to God, or, simply, a defection from Christianity.

Gregory wanted a church free of imperial or other political interference. The *Dictatus Papae*, a document expressing his ideas and possibly composed by him, sets out his views: -

The Roman pontiff alone is properly called universal. He alone may depose bishops and restore

them to office. He is the only person whose feet are kissed by princes. He may depose emperors. He may be judged by no one. He may absolve from their allegiance the subjects of the wicked. The Roman Church has never erred, and never can err, as the Scriptures testify.

If Otto and Henry represented one extreme, Gregory represented its opposite: he wanted an imperial papacy. (Hutton Webster, *Early European History*, Part II, pp.456-459)

An attempt to apply the *Dictatus Papae* in practice would have committed the church to attempting to control states. Gregory, as a practical politician wanting to achieve results, had to adopt a different approach. So he acknowledged the existence of the state as a dispensation of Providence, described the coexistence of church and state as a divine ordinance, and emphasized the necessity of union between the *sacerdotium* and the *imperium*. But he never put the two powers on an equal footing; for him, the superiority of church to state was an indisputable fact to be acknowledged by all.

This sense of papal supremacy extended to church government also. He wished all important matters to be referred to Rome. Appeals were to be addressed to him, and the powers of bishops were to be curtailed by centralizing church government in the pope's hands. Since the bishops refused to submit to this and asserted their traditional independence, Gregory's papacy is full of struggles against them.

Part of his effort for centralized control involved the promotion of clerical celibacy. In 1074, he wrote an encyclical letter absolving people from obedience to bishops who allowed married priests. A year later he required bishops to take action against married priests and to deprive them of their revenue. These decisions provoked widespread resistance and division.

During his pontificate, Gregory laid claim to papal sovereignty over Spain, Hungary, Croatia, Corsica and Sardinia. He sought to persuade the kings of Denmark and England to declare themselves his vassals. He tried organizing crusades in Spain and against the Normans (who later became his allies), but failed. In a conflict with France in the year after his election, Gregory threatened King Philip I with excommunication and deposition, but did not carry it out, perhaps because by then his conflict with Emperor Henry IV of Germany had deteriorated seriously and he had enough on his hands.

In 1074, he called a council at the Lateran which condemned simony and prescribed celibacy for the clergy, with the threat of excommunication for non-compliance added a year later. In 1075, he laid down that only the pope could appoint or depose bishops or move them from one diocese to another. This ran counter to the established practice whereby the Holy Roman (i.e. German) Emperor had substantial rights in these matters, including papal elections. Henry IV had become emperor in 1073 at the age of twenty-three. His position was

weak because of internal revolts, and Gregory took advantage of this to impose penance on him for his continued contact with members of the imperial council who had been excommunicated by Gregory. Gregory also extracted from Henry an oath of obedience and a promise to support his (Gregory's) reforms.

But, predictably perhaps, once Henry's position at home was restored, he began to re-assert the old imperial claims by appointing a new archbishop of Milan. Gregory replied by letter with a threat of excommunication and deposition. But, on Christmas Eve 1075, Gregory was kidnapped by a bandit; although freed the next day, his position was weakened.

The tone of Gregory's letter to Henry was so offensive that he alienated the German nobility and clergy. A national council, called at Worms in January 1076, listed many accusations against Gregory, including the irregularity of his election. The German and northern Italian bishops renounced their allegiance to him. Henry declared him deposed, and called on the people of Rome to choose a successor. Henry's legate arrived in Rome while Gregory was holding a synod in the Lateran basilica, and there announced his deposition. But the synod turned against the legate and it was only due to Gregory's influence that he was not killed.

On the next day, Gregory excommunicated Henry, declared him deposed, and absolved his subjects from the oath they had sworn to him. Back in Germany, the people supported Gregory, while the princes, always

resentful of imperial power, opportunistically seized the moment to revolt against Henry, loudly proclaiming their loyalty to the pope. Henry's position was weak: he had lost the support of people, princes and pope. He might have lost his throne but for the fact that the princes could not agree on a successor. They declared that Henry must make reparation to Gregory and pledge himself to obedience. They further decided that, if, on the anniversary of his excommunication, he still lay under the ban, the throne would be considered vacant. And they invited Gregory to Germany to decide the issue.

Henry decided to send an embassy to Gregory, who promptly rejected it, so he went to Italy in person, where he was greeted enthusiastically by the people of the north of the country. Gregory and Henry met at Canossa in January 1077. Henry did penance before Gregory, leaving him with little choice but to lift the excommunication. Henry chose to interpret this as lifting also the threat of deposition. A reconciliation of sorts was achieved after prolonged negotiations, but the issue of lay investiture remained unresolved. Gregory wrote,

It is the custom of the Roman church, which I unworthily serve with the help of God, to tolerate some things, and to turn a blind eye to others, following the spirit of discretion rather than the rigid letter of the law.

This suggests a flexibility which is hard to see in his actions.

Dissatisfied, the German princes elected Duke Rudolf of Rheinfelden as emperor to replace Henry. Gregory professed a neutral stance, thus alienating both parties, but after Rudolf defeated Henry in battle, Gregory, in 1080, once again declared Henry excommunicate and deposed. This was widely seen as unjust, and people began to question whether an excommunication pronounced on such clearly opportunistic grounds deserved respect. And then Rudolf died. Henry declared Gregory's ban on himself illegal, declared Gregory deposed and nominated a successor, Archbishop Guibert of Ravenna, as pope. In 1081, Gregory lost the support of thirteen cardinals. Henry invaded and captured Rome in 1084. Gregory withdrew into the Castel Sant'Angelo and refused to deal with Henry who offered to hand over Guibert to him, if he would crown him as emperor. Gregory required penance first and excommunicated Henry yet again. Henry responded by installing Guibert as Pope Clement III. The latter, not one to bite the hand that fed him, crowned Henry emperor.

Gregory, meantime, had formed an alliance with the Normans; they compelled Henry to withdraw and freed Gregory. But the people of Rome now revolted against Gregory because of the crimes of his Norman allies and he had to retreat to Monte Cassino. He died at Salerno the following year, 1085. Three days before his death he withdrew all his excommunications, except those against Henry and Guibert. The inscription on his tomb in Salerno cathedral reads, 'I have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore, I die in exile.' (Psalm 45.7 NRSV)



Relations with the East were important to Gregory. The schism of 1054 between Rome and the Byzantine Empire was one which he sought to heal. When the Arabs attacked the Eastern Christians, Gregory formed the idea of a military expedition against them and exhorted the faithful to participate in recovering the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, thereby foreshadowing the first crusade.

A man of extremes, and nothing if not controversial, Gregory was canonized in 1728.

## **SAINT MARY MAGDALEN de PAZZI: 25 May**

Catherine de Pazzi was born in 1566 into one of the wealthiest families of Renaissance Florence. They were great rivals of the Medici family who often ruled the city. At nine, she learned to meditate from the family confessor, and consciously entered on a life of prayer, penance and care for the poor. She made her first Communion at the then early age of ten, and made a vow of virginity a month later. From the age of twelve, she had mystical experiences, and, at fourteen, joined a Carmelite convent in her native Florence because there she could make Communion daily. She was given the name of Mary Magdalen. But her family wanted her to enter a dynastic marriage and brought her home. However, her determination eventually won them over and she returned.

While still a novice, she became seriously ill. Because she was expected to die, she was allowed to make her profession of vows. Immediately after doing so, she fell into an ecstasy that lasted about two hours. This was repeated after Communion on the following forty mornings.

As a safeguard against deception and to preserve the revelations, her confessor asked her to dictate her experiences to sister secretaries. Over the next six years, five large volumes were filled. The first three books record ecstasies from May 1584 to Pentecost week 1585. This week was a preparation for a severe five-year trial.

The fourth book records that trial, and the fifth is a collection of letters concerning reform and renewal. These have been re-published in recent times: *The Complete Works of Saint Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, Carmelite and Mystic, 1566–1607*, five volumes, translated by Gabriel Pausback, O.Carm., Fatima, Portugal, 1969-1973. Another book, the *Admonitions*, is a collection of sayings arising from her experiences in the formation of women religious. One of these was, ‘All for God and nothing for self.’ Many miracles were attributed to Mary Magdalen in her lifetime.

In one of her writings, she stated: -

Holy Spirit, Spirit of truth, you are the reward of the saints, the comforter of souls, light in the darkness, riches to the poor, treasure to lovers, food for the hungry, comfort to those who are wandering. To sum up, you are the One in whom all treasures are contained.

She experienced great emptiness in prayer, and was tempted to despair of herself and the world. She also endured much physical suffering. She died on 25 May 1607 at the age of forty-one, and was canonized in 1669.

## SAINT PHILIP NERI: 26 May

Philip Neri was born in Florence in 1515. He was educated by Dominicans, of whom two had great influence on him. At the age of twenty-three, while still a layman, he went to Rome and began work among the sick poor and as a home missionary. He would spend nights in prayer in the catacombs. He used to travel through the city, looking for opportunities of entering into conversation with people and leading them on to religious topics. This led to his becoming known, later in life, as the Apostle of Rome.

In 1548, he founded a confraternity to serve the needs of the thousands of poor pilgrims who came to Rome, especially in jubilee years, and also to help patients discharged from hospitals who were too weak to work. He thought of going to India as a missionary, but was dissuaded by friends who said there was abundant work to be done in Rome. At the age of thirty-six, he was ordained priest. With some companions, he began the institute known as the Oratory at the church of San Girolamo. At first, this was just a series of evening meetings in a hall (the Oratory), at which there were prayers, hymns, readings from Scripture or religious books, followed by a lecture or discussion of a religious topic. The musical selections played on those occasions came to be called *oratorios*. The idea was developed, and members of the society preached sermons in different churches every evening, a new idea in his day. Philip also spent much time hearing confessions, and

brought about many conversions in this way. The community grew and its work extended, so that Philip formally organized it into a community of secular priests, which developed into the Congregation of the Oratory.

In 1594, Philip induced Pope Clement VIII to withdraw the excommunication of King Henry IV of France, which was still in place even though the king had formally abjured his Calvinism. Philip, believing that the pope's attitude was likely to drive Henry to a relapse, and to renew the civil war in France, directed Baronius, a church historian, member of the Oratory and the pope's confessor, to refuse the pope absolution unless he withdrew the anathema. Clement yielded at once, even though the whole College of Cardinals had supported his policy. King Henry, who did not learn the facts until years afterwards, was grateful for Philip's intervention.

Philip had a sense of humour and shrewd wit. He considered a cheerful temper to be more Christian than a melancholy one, and carried this spirit into his life, saying, 'A joyful heart is more easily made perfect than a downcast one.' This was the secret of his popularity and his place in the folklore of the Roman poor. He was a friend of the joyful Capuchin questor, Saint Felix of Cantalice, and of Saints Camillus de Lellis and John Leonardi. He died in 1595 at the age of eighty.

Frederick William Faber, a member of his Oratory, said of Philip that,

Practical common sense was the special mark which distinguished his form of piety from those before him. He looked like other men; he was a modern gentleman, of scrupulous courtesy, sportive gaiety, acquainted with what was going on in the world, taking a real interest in it, giving and getting information, neatly dressed, with a shrewd common sense always alive about him, who lived in a modern room with modern furniture, and was ready to meet the needs of his day. His new religious order was un-monastic and un-medieval, with unconventional prayer, and un-systematized, although fervent, private devotion. They gave much effort to frequent and popular preaching.

Philip's great merit was to see that the monastic system could never be the leaven of secular life, but that something more homely, simple, and down-to-earth was needed. Accordingly, the congregation he founded is of the least conventional nature, resembling a residential clerical club more than a monastery. Its rules (not written by Philip, but approved by Paul V in 1612) would have appeared incredibly lax to most other founders. It admits only priests aged at least thirty-six, or clerics who have completed their studies and are ready for ordination. The members live in community, and each pays his own expenses, having the use of his private means - a startling innovation on the vow of poverty. They have a common table, but it is kept up by monthly payments from each member. Nothing is provided by the society except lodging and medical fees. Everything else -

clothing, books, furniture, medicines – are paid for by each member. There are no vows, and every member of the society is free to leave when he pleases and take his property with him. Its government is of a republican form: the superior, though first in honour, takes his turn in discharging all the duties that come to each priest in the order of his seniority, including that of waiting at table. Four deputies assist the superior in government, and all public acts are decided by a majority of votes of the whole congregation, in which the superior has no casting voice. To be chosen superior, fifteen years of membership are requisite as a qualification, and the office may be held, like all the others, for only three years at a time. No one can vote until he has been three years in the society; the deliberative voice is not obtained before the eleventh year.

Each house can call its superior to account, and can depose or restore him without appeal to any external authority; the bishop of the diocese in which a house of the Oratory is established is its ordinary and immediate superior, but without power to interfere with the rule. Their churches are non-parochial, and they can perform such rites as baptisms, marriages, etc., only by permission of the parish priest, who is entitled to receive all fees due in respect of these ministrations.

Philip was a Renaissance man, fully awake to the spirit of his time. He was also joyful, smiled, had a sense of humour and told jokes. It is not often that we hear of that among the saints. One could easily gain the impression

that they regarded laughter and jokes as frivolous and silly, unworthy of a serious person; that is a loss.

Philip used to say, 'Cast yourself into the arms of God and be very sure that if he wants anything of you, he will fit you for the work and give you strength.'



## **SAINT AUGUSTINE of CANTERBURY: 27 May**

In Roman Britain, by the mid-fourth century, there was a substantial and growing Christian presence. But after the withdrawal of the Roman army in 410, the Christians were left to defend themselves against strong - and eventually successful - attacks by the pagan Saxons, who captured much of the south of the country, destroying most signs of Roman presence, including the church.

However, Western Britain, including Wales, remained Christian. This church developed under the leadership of Irish missionaries in isolation from Rome. The focus of its life was the monastery rather than the diocese. It seems that it made little effort to Christianize the Anglo-Saxons.

The Venerable Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, states that, one day in Rome, Pope Gregory I saw fair-haired Anglo-Saxons from Britain being sold as slaves. Observing that they looked more like angels than Angles, he decided to try to convert their people. So, in 595, he sent a mission of some thirty men to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity.

At that time, the kingdom of Kent was ruled by King Ethelbert, whose wife, Bertha, was a Christian. The daughter of a Frankish king, she had brought a Frankish bishop with her to minister to her and to local Christians. In 595, Pope (later Saint) Gregory I chose Augustine, a Benedictine, to lead the mission, bringing letters of

support, interpreters, and priests from Frankish bishops and kings. (Augustine's place and date of birth are unknown.) It was in the political interest of the Frankish kings to support the mission, and it is likely, too, that part at least of Gregory's reason for the mission was to acquire new territory under his primacy.

On their way to Britain the new missionaries became so discouraged that they sent Augustine back to Gregory asking to be allowed to return home. But, by letter, Gregory urged them to continue. In 597, they arrived on the island of Thanet, off the coast of Kent. Ethelbert converted to Christianity, and the missionaries preached in his capital of Canterbury. There, Augustine, already ordained a bishop, set up his see. (Pope Gregory had directed that it be at London.) Mass baptisms quickly followed the king's conversion, and more missionaries arrived in 601. They brought with them a *pallium*, the symbol of a metropolitan archbishop, for Augustine, and a letter directing him to ordain twelve bishops, including an archbishop at York.

Gregory had decreed that Christians in the west should submit to Augustine and their bishops obey him. He may have believed that more of the Roman governmental and ecclesiastical organization had survived than was actually the case. According to Bede, the Britons in these regions viewed Augustine with uncertainty. Chroniclers relate that when he summoned the British bishops to meet him, they decided to first consult their people. For their part, these said that they would see whether Augustine would treat their bishops with respect. When

the bishops entered the hall where Augustine was seated, he did not rise to acknowledge them. This was seen as an act of disrespect by him, a new manifestation of the arrogance of the old Roman *imperium*, and relations soured. Bede described Augustine's manner as 'arrogant and ill-tempered.' (*History of the English Church and People*, II.2)

Pope Gregory had specified that English bishops would have no authority over their Frankish counterparts, and vice versa. The Roman liturgy was to be used, and pagan temples made over to Christian use. It seems that Augustine had little understanding of, or sensitivity to, the local Christian presence which had sustained itself for almost two hundred years in the face of constant pagan attack. There were differences of pastoral practice and church organization between the Roman and the British churches, the latter looking to Iona for direction. To British Christians, Augustine's mission must have seemed like a new Roman conquest under papal auspices.

The dating of Easter was a bone of contention. Bede describes how, well after Augustine's death, at the Synod of Whitby in 664, Rome's representative criticized the Celtic system of dating, saying, 'The only people who stupidly contend against the whole world are Irishmen and their counterparts in obstinacy, the Picts and the Britons...' The Irish delegate replied to the effect that if they were being called stupid, then so was the apostle John, on whose Gospel they based their system. (See Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English*

*People*, edited by D. H. Farmer, translated by Leo Shirley-Price, Penguin, London, 1955, pp. 186-189.) Rome had itself followed John, and changed its system more than once. The Roman delegate used the argument that its custom had the sanction of Saint Peter, who held the keys of heaven. This swayed King Oswy of Northumbria, who said that he would not oppose Saint Peter, 'lest when I come before the gates of the kingdom of heaven, he who holds the keys should not allow me in.' (Bede, *op. cit.*, 3.25) (In later years, Pope Honorius I threatened with excommunication anyone who did not accept the Roman line on the issue.)

The real issue was one of authority, though some might say ego or status. In 604, the British bishops did not accept Augustine's authority. In the longer term, however, the Roman position won out over that of Iona.

Having ordained a successor, Laurence, Augustine died on 26 May 604. His mission scarcely reached beyond Kent, though he did send two bishops, Justus (later Archbishop of Canterbury and recognized as a saint) and Mellitus, beyond its borders. Others of the Celtic tradition, such as Aidan of Lindisfarne, reached out to the Anglo-Saxons and began converting them. Joseph Lightfoot, the Anglican bishop of Durham, wrote that, 'Augustine was the apostle of Kent, but Aidan was the apostle of England.' Augustine was soon revered as a saint. His burial place was destroyed in the Reformation.

## SAINT JUSTIN: 1 June

Justin was born into a pagan family at Nablus in Samaria, Palestine, about the start of the second century. He studied current philosophical theories, especially Stoicism and Platonism. Then, as he recounts in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, one day he met an old man on the seashore, possibly a Palestinian or Syrian Christian, who engaged him in a dialogue about God. The old man said, in effect, that humanity was neither self-sufficient nor self-explanatory, and that the testimony of the prophets was more reliable than the reasoning of the philosophers. He said: -

There existed, long before this time, certain men older than all those who are esteemed philosophers, both righteous and beloved by God, who spoke by the Divine Spirit, and foretold events which would take place, and which are now taking place. They are called prophets. These alone both saw and announced the truth to humanity, neither reverencing nor fearing any person, nor influenced by a desire for glory, but speaking those things alone which they saw and heard, being filled with the Holy Spirit. Their writings are still extant, and those who read them are helped in their knowledge of the beginning and end of things. And those events which have happened, and those which are happening, compel you to assent to the utterances made by them.

In conclusion, the old man urged Justin, saying: -

Above all things, pray that the gates of light may be opened to you; for these things cannot be perceived or understood by all, but only by the one to whom God and his Christ have imparted wisdom. (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 7.3)

Justin described his reaction to this: -

Straightway a flame was kindled in my soul. A love of the prophets, and of those who are friends of Christ, possessed me. Thinking about his words, I found this philosophy alone to be safe and beneficial.

This gave him a love of Christ, and led him to the faith. Influenced, too, by the fearlessness of Christians facing persecution, he was baptized at about the age of thirty. From there on, his writings were principally a defence or exposition of the Christian faith.

In his *First Apologia*, addressed to Emperor Antoninus Pius, Justin gives some of the earliest Christian understanding on the Eucharist: -

This food is called among us the Eucharist. Not as common bread and drink do we receive these; but as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of his word, and from which our blood and flesh are nourished, is the

flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.  
(From *Apologia*, 1.65-67)

The master who taught us this worship, and who was born to this end, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, in the reign of Tiberius Caesar.

We hold this worship on Sunday, since this is the first day on which God, by transforming darkness and chaos, made the universe, and the day on which Jesus Christ our Saviour rose from the dead.  
(*Apologia*, 1.67; PG 6.429, 432)

He describes what they did: -

On the day which we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place. The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. When the reader has finished, the presider over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things. Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves... and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation. When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss.

Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to the one who presides over the brethren. He takes them and offers praise and glory to God the Father of the universe, through the

name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and for a considerable time he gives thanks that we have been judged worthy of these gifts. When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying, ‘Amen.’ When the presider has given thanks, and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the “eucharisted” bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent. (*Apologia* 1.65-67)

Because this bread and wine have been eucharisted, we call this food *Eucharist*, and no one may take part in it unless he believes that what we teach is true, has received baptism for the forgiveness of sins and new birth, and lives in keeping with what Christ taught. (*Apologia* 1.66.1-2; PG 6.428)

And Justin did not forget the collection!

Those who are well off, and are also willing, give as each chooses. What is gathered is given to the presider to assist orphans and widows, those whom illness or any other cause has deprived of resources, prisoners, immigrants, and, in a word, all who are in need. (*Apologia*, 1.67; PG 6.429)

He also wrote about baptism: -

Baptism is God’s most beautiful and magnificent gift... We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of re-



birth, seal and most precious gift. It is called *gift*, because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; *grace*, since it is given even to the guilty; *baptism*, because sin is buried in the water; *anointing*, for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; *enlightenment*, because it radiates light; *clothing*, since it veils our shame; *bath*, because it washes; and *seal*, as it is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship. (*Apologia* 1.61.12; PG 6.421)

Justin produced many works, of which only two survive, the *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, which he wrote at Ephesus, in present-day Turkey, and the two *Apologiae*, written in Rome about 155 and 161, which set out for pagans a case for Christianity. In the *Dialogue*, Justin said that the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Christ, so the old covenant was now redundant, and Gentiles took the place of Israel. The first *Apologia* was addressed to Emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161), and the second to the Roman Senate during the reign of his successor, Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180). Justin is regarded as the foremost interpreter in the second century of the theology of the Logos, the eternal Word of God embodied in Jesus. He held that the Word had sown the seed of truth in all people and become incarnate in Christ.

In his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, Justin wrote: -

There will never be another God, Trypho, and there has been no other since the world began... than he

who made and ordered the universe. We do not think that our God is different from yours. He is the same who brought your fathers out of Egypt ‘by his powerful hand and outstretched arm.’ We do not place our hope in some other god, for there is none, but in the same God as you do: the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (11.1; PG 6.497)

He opened a free school in Rome where he taught the Christian faith as a new, and true, philosophy. This was at a time when Christians were called atheists. He wrote of this: ‘We are called atheists. And we admit that, in respect of such supposed gods [as those of Rome and Greece] we *are* atheists, but not in regard to the most true God, the Father of righteousness.’ Probably anticipating that his rejection of the Roman gods would draw down trouble on himself, he added, ‘We hope to suffer torment for our Lord Jesus Christ and so to be saved.’

Ironically, the emperor who ordered his execution, one of the most severe persecutors of Christians, was the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius, to whose Senate Justin had addressed the second part of his *Apologia*. Along with six others, Justin was beheaded for the faith about 165 AD.

## **SAINTS MARCELLINUS and PETER: 2 June**

Little is known about the lives of Marcellinus and Peter, except that they died for the faith in 304, during a persecution by the Roman emperor, Diocletian. Marcellinus was a priest, and Peter an exorcist. Pope Damasus I claimed that he heard their story from their executioner who became a Christian after their deaths. In his account, which is the oldest extant, Damasus states that they were killed by a magistrate Severus, or Serenus, who chose an out-of-the-way spot for their deaths so that other Christians would not have a chance to bury their bodies and venerate them. He says that the two saints happily cleared the spot chosen for their death, a thicket overgrown with thorns, brambles, and briars about five km from Rome. They were beheaded and buried there.

Two Christian women, Lucilla and Firmina, found their bodies, however, and had them properly buried in what became known as the catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter on the Via Labicana, over which a church was built. Tradition has it that their jailer and his family converted to the faith and were also executed.

Pope Damasus I wrote an epitaph with the details of their death with which he adorned their tomb. They were venerated by the early Christian church, and their names are mentioned in the first Eucharistic Prayer and in various martyrologies and calendars.

From the seventh century onwards, their sepulchre became a site of pilgrimage, and their feast day, 2 June, was recorded in local liturgies and hagiographies.

There is a church in their honour at Seligenstadt in Germany where their relics are said to be housed, having been sent there in 827 by Pope Gregory IV to one Einhard, a secretary of Charlemagne. But the reliability of this claim has been seriously questioned. The cathedral at Cremona in Italy also claims some of their relics.

**SAINTS CHARLES LWANGA and companions,  
MARTYRS OF UGANDA: 3 June**

Lwanga was born in the 1860's in Buddu, in the kingdom of Buganda in the southern part of modern Uganda. He served as a page, and later *major-domo*, in the court of King Mwanga II. As part of an effort to resist colonization, the king began to insist that Christian converts abandon their faith. He executed many Christians, both Anglicans and Catholics, between 1885 and 1887. Many of these, including Charles, were officials of the royal court or otherwise in positions close to the king.

The persecution started in 1885 with a massacre of Anglican missionaries, including Bishop James Hannington. The leader of the Catholic community, Joseph Mukasa, who was then *major-domo* of the court as well as a catechist, reproached the king for the killings, against which he had advised him. Mwanga had Mukasa beheaded, and arrested his followers. This took place on 15 November 1885. The king then ordered Lwanga, who was chief page at the time, to take up Mukasa's duties. That same day, Lwanga sought baptism as a Catholic from a missionary priest, and was given the name of Charles.

On 25 May 1886, Mwanga ordered a general assembly of the court while it was at Munyonyo. Here he charged two of the pages, whom he then condemned to death. The following morning, Lwanga secretly baptized those

pages who were still only catechumens. Later that day, the king called an assembly in which he interrogated all present to see if any would renounce Christianity. Led by Lwanga, the royal pages declared their fidelity to their religion, upon which the king ordered them bound and condemned to death, directing that they be marched to the traditional place of execution. Two of the prisoners were executed on the march there.

On 3 June 1866, Charles was separated from the others for private execution by the Guardian of the Sacred Flame, in keeping with custom. It is said that, as he was being burned, Charles said to the Guardian, 'It is as if you are pouring water on me. Repent and become a Christian.'

Twelve Catholic boys and men and nine Anglicans were then burnt alive. The youngest of them, Kizito, remained steadfast despite appeals from his family. Another Catholic, Mbaga Tuzinde, was speared to death for refusing to renounce the faith, and his body was thrown into the fire to be burned, along with those of Lwanga and the others.

Another reason the king was so hostile to his Christian servants was that they refused to accede to his demands to participate in homosexual acts with him, a practice he had learned from Arab traders. Charles Lwanga, in particular, had protected the pages from Mwanga's advances. By their deaths they bore witness that there is a law higher than the king's, namely, that of conscience.

Like Saint Thomas More, they died the king's good servants, but God's first.

An African writer has said that a larger motive for the executions was Mwanga's effort to offset foreign threats to his power. His primary concern was for the integrity of his kingdom, and he believed that men such as Lwanga were working with foreigners in 'poisoning the very roots of his kingdom.' Not to have taken action could have led to suggestions that Mwanga was weak.  
(1)

Charles Lwanga and the fourteen other Catholics who accompanied him in death were declared blessed by Pope Benedict XV in 1920. Some time later, there was discussion in the church about the admission of Africans to ordination. There was agreement as to the need and appropriateness, but disagreement as to timing. Some said it was premature, others that the time had come. Discussion went back and forth until Pius XI made a decision, saying, 'If Africa can produce martyrs, it can produce priests.' One of the first to be ordained was a Ugandan. This could be considered an illustration of the saying of the early African Christian writer, Tertullian, that, 'The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.' (*Apologeticum*, 50.12 in PL, 1.534) The pope declared Charles to be patron saint of young people and of Catholic Action in sub-Saharan Africa.

The martyrs of Uganda were canonized in 1964 by Pope Paul VI. Although the Anglicans could not be canonized, they were named on the occasion as

‘deserving mention for enduring death for the name of Christ.’

- 1) Assa Okoth, *A History of Africa: African Societies and the Establishment of Colonial Rule*, East African Publishers, 2006, pp.86–87.



## SAINT BONIFACE: 5 June

Boniface is thought to have been born at Crediton, Devonshire, England, about the year 680, and was given the name of Wynfrith in baptism. He came from a wealthy family, and, against his father's wishes, joined a Benedictine monastery in Exeter. He later moved to a monastery near Winchester, where he became a teacher; he wrote some teaching manuals, and was ordained at the age of thirty. When the abbot of the monastery died, he was expected to succeed him, but opted instead, in 716, for missionary work in Frisia in the Netherlands. He worked for a time with Saint Willibrord, known as 'the Apostle of the Frisians,' but their efforts were frustrated by war, so Boniface returned to England.

There is abundant material about Boniface's life, work, and death: a number of *Lives* remain (one written just ten years after his death), together with legal documents, sermons, and over a hundred letters to or from him.

He returned to the continent in 717, this time going to Rome, where Pope Gregory II appointed him bishop for Germania, an indeterminate area with no church organization, and gave him the name of Boniface, derived from the Latin *bonum facere*, meaning to do good. Boniface focused his efforts on Bavaria and Thuringia. He would never see England again, though he remained in correspondence with his countrymen and women all his life.

According to his *Lives*, Boniface, in 723, felled the Oak of Thor, a Germanic god, at Geismar, near Fritzlar, not far from Fulda. (Thursday is Thor's day.) He called upon Thor to strike him down if he wished. According to Willibald, an early biographer, Boniface had begun to chop the oak down, when suddenly a great wind blew it over. When Thor did not kill him, people were amazed and converted to Christianity. From its wood, Boniface built a chapel dedicated to Saint Peter.

The support of the Frankish and Carolingian rulers was essential to his work. He had been under the protection of King Charles Martel. The Christian Frankish leaders wanted to defeat their rival power, the pagan Saxons, and to incorporate Saxon lands into their territory. Boniface's destruction of Germanic paganism and its ritual sites may have benefited the Franks in their campaign against the Saxons. In the circumstances of his time, Boniface could not have kept out of political affairs – politics and religion were inseparable. Both he and pagan leaders would have agreed that religion is not something private, like a hobby, but about all of life.

In 732, Boniface travelled to Rome again to report, and Pope Gregory II made him archbishop, with jurisdiction over Germany, east of the River Rhine. He returned there and baptized thousands. During a third visit to Rome in 737–38, he was made papal legate for Germany. He founded an abbey at Fulda which is still an important centre today.

Boniface's work in central Europe is ambiguous: according to some scholars, what he reported to Rome as conversions of 'pagans, heretics, heathens, hypocrites and false priests' was his imposition, with military help from King Charles Martel, of Roman and Benedictine control over Celtic monasteries.

After his third trip to Rome, he was appointed archbishop of Mainz by Charles Martel about 746. He explained to a friend, Daniel of Winchester, that, without the protection of Charles, he could 'neither administer the church, defend the clergy, nor prevent idolatry.' He attempted to maintain independence, however, by retaining the support of the papacy, and by appointing his followers as bishops. The Carolingians were content with this, as long as Christianity was brought to the Saxons and other Germanic tribes. But his relationship with the kings of the Franks was often turbulent.

A council of the church in Germany was held in 743. Although Boniface was not able to safeguard church property from seizure by local rulers, he did achieve one goal, the adoption of stricter guidelines for the clergy, who were often from the nobility and not always amenable to church discipline.

Boniface never gave up on his hope of converting the Frisians and returned to them in 752. He baptized a great number and summoned a general meeting for confirmation at Dokkum in Frisia. However, instead of converts, a group of armed men appeared. Boniface said to his armed comrades who sought to defend him, 'Stop

fighting. Lay down your arms, for we are told in Scripture not to render evil for good but to overcome evil by good.’ (See Romans 12.21) Along with fifty-two others, he was killed. It was the eve of Pentecost, 5 June 754. His remains were brought first to Utrecht and then, in 819, to the monastery of Fulda in Bavaria, which he had founded in 735, and which is a place of pilgrimage today. Boniface is the patron saint of Germany. He is honoured also in the Lutheran Church, the Anglican Communion, and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Boniface has been described as ‘one of the truly outstanding creators of the first Europe, the apostle of Germany, and reformer of the Frankish church.’ (Norman F. Cantor) He did more than any other missionary to bring Christianity to the peoples of Germany. Through his efforts to reorganize and regulate the church of the Franks, he helped shape Western Christianity, and many of the dioceses he proposed remain today. After his martyrdom, he was hailed as a saint in Germany and England, where his cult is strong today. Boniface is celebrated - and criticized - as a missionary. He is regarded as a German national figure and a unifier of Europe.

(For Boniface’s work in Romanizing Celtic monasteries, see: Ebrard, Johannes Henrich August, *Die iroschottische Mönkskirche*, Gütersloh, 1873; Talbot, C. H., *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany*, Sheed and Ward, New York, 1954); and Wissig, Otto, *Iroschotten und Bonifatius in Deutschland*, Gütersloh, Bertelsmann, 1932.

## **SAINT NORBERT: 6 June**

Norbert Gennet was born in Xanten in Germany about 1080, the son of minor nobility. Through the influence of his family he obtained a subsidy from his parish church on his ordination as sub-deacon. His only work was to chant the Divine Office at the church, but it seems he paid someone a (small) fee to take his place there, because he had gained an appointment with the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry V, in Cologne. The salaries from Xanten parish and the imperial treasury were enough to enable him to live in style.

Norbert avoided ordination to the priesthood and declined an appointment as bishop of Cambrai in 1113. But, one day, as he rode his horse to a village during a storm, a bolt of lightning struck near the horse's feet. Norbert was thrown and lay unconscious for nearly an hour. Following this, he renounced his appointment at court and returned to Xanten to lead a life of penance, placing himself under the direction of Cono, abbot of Saint Sigeberg, near Cologne. In gratitude to Cono, Norbert, in 1115, founded an abbey and made it over to Cono and his monks. He was then thirty-five. Soon afterward he was ordained to the priesthood and became devoted to the Eucharist and to Our Lady.

In reforming mode, Norbert adopted an asceticism so fierce that his first three disciples died as a result of it. (Reformers can be dangerous people.) This may account for the failure of his attempts to reform the canons of

Xanten. In 1118, they denounced him at a regional church council as an innovator.

Norbert's loveless fanaticism was closer in spirit to the Pharisees than to Jesus; see Luke 18.9-14. Karen Armstrong has a better approach than his, 'Love does the job of destroying the ego, not in a binge of self-hatred or contempt, but by leaving its limitations behind for the sake of the other. In gentleness it transcends the ego.' (*A History of God. From Abraham to the Present: the 4000-year Quest for God*, Heinemann, London, 1993, pp.260-261)

Norbert then resigned his benefice, sold his property, and gave the proceeds to the poor. He visited Pope Gelasius II, who gave him permission to become an itinerant preacher. He preached throughout western Germany, Belgium and northern France, being credited with a number of miracles. In place after place he encountered a demoralized clergy, lonely, living in concubinage, and feeling that the church's leadership cared little about them.

In Paris, he probably encountered the Augustinian Canons of St. Victor, who had adopted ascetic ideals. At Clairvaux and Cîteaux, he likely saw the effect of the Cistercian reforms and the Cistercian administrative system that created an international federation of monasteries with a blend of centralized power and local autonomy. These reforms affected him significantly in his future work.

At the Council of Reims in October 1119, Pope Callistus II asked Norbert to found a religious order in the diocese of Laon in France. On Christmas Day, 1120, Norbert established the Canons Regular of Prémontré, with, initially, thirteen disciples. By the following year the community had grown to forty. The young community at first lived in huts of wood and clay, arranged like a camp around the chapel of Saint John the Baptist, but they soon built a larger church and a monastery for new recruits. In 1125, the *Constitutions* of the order were approved by Pope Honorius II. Soon, new houses were being founded in Germany, France, Belgium, Hungary and Romania. Their lives were built around the choral recitation of the Divine Office, community living, preaching and manual work.

Norbert continued to be a travelling preacher and became known as the Apostle of Antwerp, in Belgium, for his Eucharistic sermons. But, in 1126, Pope Honorius II appointed him archbishop of Magdeburg, where he put his reforms into effect. Several attempts were made on his life as he began to reform the lax discipline of his see. He was especially vigorous in protecting the Church's rights against the secular power.

In the schism following the election of Pope Innocent II in 1130, Norbert supported Innocent and resisted Antipope Anacletus II. In his last years, he was chancellor to Lothair II, the Holy Roman Emperor, persuading him to lead an army in 1133 to Rome to restore Innocent to the papacy. Norbert died in

Magdeburg on 6 June 1134, and was canonized by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582.



## **SAINT EPHRAEM of SYRIA, DEACON: 9 June**

Ephraem was born around 306 in the city of Nisibis, the modern Turkish town of Nusaybin, on the border with Syria, in the Roman Province of Mesopotamia. His parents were part of the growing Christian community there. The local culture included Judaism, pagan religions and Christian sects.

Jacob, the second bishop of Nisibis, was appointed in 308, and attended the first Council of Nicaea in 325. Ephraem grew up under his leadership. He was baptized as a youth, and almost certainly became what was called “a son of the covenant”, a type of early semi-monastic life peculiar to Syria, a close-knit, urban community of Christians who “covenanted” themselves to service and to refrain from sexual activity. He was ordained a deacon either at his baptism or later. He is popularly credited as the founder of the School of Nisibis, which, in later centuries, became the main centre of learning of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

In 337, Emperor Constantine I, who had legalised and promoted the practice of Christianity in the Roman Empire, died. Seizing this opportunity, King Shapur II of Persia began a series of attacks on Mesopotamia and beyond. Nisibis was besieged in 338, 346 and 350. Ephraem credits Bishop Jacob with defending the city by his prayers during the first siege. In the third siege, Shapur re-routed the local river to undermine the city walls. But the people quickly repaired them so that the

Persian elephant cavalry became bogged down in the wet ground. Ephraem celebrated what he saw as the miraculous salvation of the city in a hymn which portrayed Nisibis as being like Noah's Ark, floating to safety on the flood. However, in 363, the city was captured and the Christian population expelled.

Ephraem, then in his late fifties, seems to have continued his work as a teacher, perhaps in Edessa in south-eastern Turkey, which was at the heart of the Syriac-speaking world. He is unique among theologians in that his theological writings are mostly in verse. He wrote a great number of poems and hymns defending Nicene orthodoxy. In a style very different from that of the West, he used paradox, and images from nature, daily life, and the Gospels instead of concepts or definitions. He wrote, 'Truth and love are wings that cannot be separated, for truth cannot fly without love, nor can love soar aloft without truth; they are bound together in friendship.'

Some five hundred hymns composed by him are still extant, and his total output is said to have run to three million lines! In his writing, he drew on three sources: early Rabbinic Judaism, Greek science and philosophy, and the Mesopotamian/Persian tradition of mystery symbolism. His most important works are lyric, teaching hymns, known as *madrase*; these are full of rich, poetic imagery drawn from biblical sources, folk tradition, and other religions and philosophies. They employ colourful metaphors in over fifty different metrical schemes. They are gathered into various cycles, were sung by an all-

female choir which he directed, to the accompaniment of musical instruments, and each had a refrain repeated after every verse. Particularly influential were his *Hymns against Heresies*. He also wrote homilies in verse.

Pope Benedict XVI said of him in 2007 that his theology was liturgy and music at the same time. He followed faithfully the exhortation of Saint Paul, ‘With gratitude in your hearts, sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God.’ (Colossians 3.16) He also said of him that, ‘The way he wrote about women was always prompted by sensibility and respect: the fact that Jesus dwelt in the womb of Mary has enormously raised woman's dignity. For Ephraem, just as there is no redemption without Jesus, so also there is no incarnation without Mary.’ And Ephraem himself wrote, ‘You [Jesus] alone and your Mother are more beautiful than any others, for there is no blemish in you nor any stains upon your Mother. Who of my children can compare in beauty to these?’ (*Nisibene Hymns* 27.8)

In prose, he wrote biblical commentaries on Genesis, Exodus, the Acts and Letters of Saint Paul. He wrote in Syriac, but translations exist in Armenian, Coptic, Georgian, Greek and other languages. Syriac churches still use many of his hymns as part of the annual cycle of worship. The style and content of his writing became so popular that a huge body of writings, mostly in Greek, developed in later years, were falsely attributed to him. The best known of these is the *Prayer of Saint Ephraem* which is recited at every service during Great Lent in Eastern Christianity. He was said to have made many

journeys to other great saints of his time, but this is seen simply as a literary device to link them.

Here are some of his prayers and sayings: -

‘Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of laziness, of faint heartedness, of lust for power and idle talk. Give me instead the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love. Yes, my Lord and King, grant that I may see my own errors and not judge my brothers and sisters, you who are blessed from all ages to all ages. Amen.’

‘Blessed be God

Blessed be God who in love stooped down to redeem humanity.

Blessed be God who became poor to enrich the needy.

Blessed be God who fulfilled the promises of the prophets.

Blessed be God who made the creation rejoice with wealth and treasure.

Blessed be God whose praises the dumb sing in their hearts.

Blessed be God to whom children sing hymns of joy.

Blessed be God.’

‘You are the guest who filled the jars with good wine.

Fill my mouth with your praise.’

‘Blessed are those who have consented to become the close friends of faith and of prayer: they live in single-

mindfulness and make prayer and faith stop by with them.’

Sunrise marks the hour for toil to begin. But, in our souls, Lord, prepare a dwelling for the day that will never end.’

Ephraem died of plague on 9 June 373, while nursing its victims. He has been called the most significant of all of the Fathers of the Syriac-speaking church, and is especially loved in the Syrian Orthodox Church. He became known as ‘the Harp of the Holy Spirit,’ and, in 1920, was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church.

## **SAINT BARNABAS: 11 June**

Barnabas' story appears in the Acts of the Apostles, and Paul mentions him in some of his letters. Born Joseph, a Levite, he is usually identified, on the basis of Colossians 4, as a cousin of Mark the evangelist. The name Barnabas is a nickname meaning “son of encouragement.” He was one of the earliest Christian disciples in Jerusalem, described as ‘a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith.’ (Acts 11.23) According to Acts 4.36, he was a native of Cyprus, where he possessed land (Acts 4.36, 37) which he sold, giving the proceeds to the church in Jerusalem.

When Paul returned to Jerusalem after his conversion, Barnabas took him and introduced him to the apostles, persuading them that their former persecutor was now truly a disciple. (Acts 9.26-27) The growth of the church at Antioch led the community in Jerusalem to send Barnabas there to superintend the movement. He went to Tarsus in search of Paul, ‘an admirable colleague’, to assist him. Paul returned with him to Antioch and worked with him for a year (Acts 11.25, 26). At the end of this period, the two went to Jerusalem (AD 44) with the contributions the church at Antioch had made for the Jerusalem church.

Described as a prophet and teacher in Acts 13.1, and as an apostle in Acts 14.14, Barnabas, along with Paul, undertook missionary journeys and defended Gentile converts against a faction promoting Gentile

circumcision. They gained many converts in Antioch (Acts 13.1) about 43-44 AD, and elsewhere (c.45-47), and participated in the council of Jerusalem. (c.50) Barnabas and Paul successfully evangelized among the 'God-fearing' Gentiles who attended synagogues in Greek cities of Anatolia (in modern Turkey).

Shortly after they returned, bringing John Mark with them, they were appointed as missionaries to Asia Minor, and in this capacity visited Cyprus and some of the principal cities of Asia Minor. (Acts 13.14) With the conversion of Sergius Paulus, Roman proconsul of Cyprus, Paul began to gain prominence over Barnabas to the point where "Paul," his Roman name, is substituted for "Saul." (Acts 13.9) Instead of "Barnabas and Saul" as before (11.30; 12.25; 13.2, 7) we now read "Paul and Barnabas." (13.43, 46, 50; 14.20; 15.2, 22, 35) Only in 14.14 and 15.12, 25, does Barnabas again occupy the first place, in the first passage with recollection of 14.12, and, in the last two, because Barnabas was closer to the Jerusalem church than was Paul.

Paul appears as the preaching missionary (13.16; 14.8-9, 19-20), so that the people of Lystra (in Turkey) regarded him as Hermes and Barnabas as Zeus. (14:12) Returning from this first missionary journey to Antioch, they were again sent up to Jerusalem to consult with the church regarding the relation of Gentiles to the church (Acts 15.2; Galatians 2.1). According to Galatians 2.9-10, Barnabas was included with Paul in the agreement that they should in future preach to the pagans, not forgetting the poor at Jerusalem. With this matter settled,

they returned again to Antioch, bringing the agreement of the council that Gentiles were to be admitted to the church without having to observe the law of Moses..

It is likely that the letter to the Galatians was written prior to the Jerusalem council, and that it refers to a meeting between Paul, Barnabas, Peter, James and John that happened earlier. It would have been strange for Paul to have omitted the fact that the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church had not made circumcision a requirement for Gentiles considering the topic of the letter after it became a controversy in Galatia. It is more likely that the letter was written some time before the Jerusalem council, and that teachers came from Jerusalem to Antioch teaching the need for it after Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians addressing this issue.

After they had returned to Antioch from the Jerusalem council (15.35), Paul asked Barnabas to accompany him on another journey. (15.36) Barnabas wished to take John Mark along, but Paul did not, as John Mark had left them on the former journey (13.13; 15.36-40). The dispute ended by Paul and Barnabas taking separate routes, Paul taking Silas as his companion through Syria and Cilicia, and Barnabas taking John Mark to Cyprus. (15.36-41)

Barnabas is not mentioned again by Luke in Acts. However, in Galatians 2.13, a little more is learned about him, that he followed Peter's example of not eating with Gentiles, and, from 1 Corinthians 9.6, it may be gathered that he continued to work as a missionary. It seems from



Philemon 24 that his difference with Paul over Mark was resolved; Paul actually asked for Mark ‘for he is useful in my ministry.’ (2 Timothy 4.11) Pope Benedict XVI commented on these quarrels, saying,

Holiness does not consist in never having erred or sinned. Holiness increases the capacity for conversion, for repentance, for willingness to start again, and, especially, for reconciliation and forgiveness.... it is not the fact that we have never erred, but our capacity for reconciliation and forgiveness that makes us saints. And we can all learn this way of holiness.

Antioch, the third-most important city of the Roman Empire, then the capital of the Roman province of Syria, (today Antakya, Turkey) was where the disciples were first called Christians. It was the site of an early Christian community, traditionally said to have been founded by Peter. A considerable minority of the Antioch church of Barnabas' time belonged to the merchant class, and they provided support for the poorer Jerusalem church.

Church tradition tells the legend of the martyrdom of Barnabas. It is that some Jews, coming to Salamis in Cyprus, where Barnabas was preaching, and angered by his success, dragged him out of the synagogue and stoned him to death. His kinsman, John Mark, who saw this, buried him privately.

Barnabas is traditionally identified as the founder of the Cypriot church. According to the *History of the Cyprus Church*, in 478, he appeared in a dream to Anthemios, the Archbishop of Salamis, and revealed to him the place of his tomb. The following day, Anthemios discovered it, and inside, the remains of Barnabas with a manuscript of Matthew's Gospel on his chest. Anthemios presented the gospel to Emperor Zeno at Constantinople and received from him the privileges of the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus, that is, the purple cloak which the Greek Archbishop of Cyprus wears at festivals of the church, the imperial sceptre, and the red ink with which he affixes his signature. Anthemios then placed the remains of Barnabas in a church which he had built near the tomb. Excavations near the site of a present-day church and monastery have revealed an early church with two empty tombs, said to be those of Barnabas and Anthemios.

This story of dream and discovery has the sound of something conjured up to strengthen the claim of the Cypriot church to an apostolic origin in order to shake off the overlordship of the Patriarch of Antioch. There are similar stories from elsewhere with a similar purpose.

The statements as to the year of Barnabas's death are untrustworthy.

(The *Epistle of Barnabas*, believed to have been written between 70 and 150 AD, comes from another writer, an anti-Semitic Alexandrian Christian.)

## **SAINT ANTHONY: 13 June**

A boy was born in Lisbon, Portugal, on 15 August 1195, to Martin and Maria Bulhões. He was baptized with the name Fernando in the cathedral across the road from the family home, and was educated at the cathedral school. At the age of fifteen, he entered the Order of Saint Augustine.

He became a great scholar, who seemed, among other things, to have had a prodigious memory, especially of texts from the Bible and the fathers of the church. This was to be a major influence on his later preaching.

In 1219, already ordained priest, he was based in the university city of Coimbra. As guest-master of the house he welcomed six Franciscan friars, Berard and five companions, who were going to Morocco as missionaries. Not very long after, their remains were returned to Coimbra; they had been executed on 16 January 1220. Anthony wanted to become a missionary and a martyr. He asked for permission to transfer to the newly-founded Franciscans, saying, ‘Brother, I would gladly put on the habit of your Order if you would promise to send me as soon as possible to the land of the Saracens, that I may gain the crown of the holy martyrs.’ He was admitted, and given the name of Anthony. His heart-felt desire was met when, in his first year, he was appointed to North Africa as a missionary. (Saints make saints: Francis of Assisi began; Berard and his

companions followed; Anthony followed Berard; and others followed Anthony.)

But there, before he began at all, he became seriously ill and was close to death. He was forced to set out for home. But his ship was blown off course by a storm and he came ashore on the coast near Messina in Sicily, from where he made his way to Assisi at Pentecost 1221, for a general chapter, the “Chapter of Mats,” attended by some three thousand friars. (There is no record of his meeting Saint Francis on that occasion.)

No one took any notice of him there, and, when it ended, he was appointed as cook to the hermitage of Monte Paolo near the town of Forlì, where it was felt that a quiet life would help his recovery. While there he went to an ordination in the town in 1222. Through an oversight, no arrangement had been made for a preacher, so the guardian asked for one from among the Dominicans and the other Franciscans. They all declined, saying they had not prepared. Then Anthony the cook was asked to preach. He did so, hesitantly at first, but then growing in confidence. His sermon made a deep impression on his hearers. Perhaps it was the memory of this occasion that later led him to say, ‘Happy the man whose words come from the Holy Spirit and not from himself!’

In 1224, Saint Francis, having heard about him, wrote to him, saying, ‘It pleases me that you should teach the friars sacred theology, provided that in such studies they do not destroy the spirit of holy prayer and devotion, as

written in the Rule.’ Anthony taught in Toulouse, Montpellier, Padua and Bologna. Although none of his lectures or conferences has come down to us, there are two volumes of his sermons to the people – *Sunday Sermons* and *Feast-Day Sermons* - and he is best known as a popular preacher. His sermons were characterized by simplicity and joy. One point he made to his hearers was to say, ‘Think of each day as a beginning, and try to live with the fervour with which you first began.’ And, ‘If created things are so utterly beautiful, how much more glorious must be the one who created them! The wisdom of the worker is revealed in his work!’

Anthony’s prayers, too, were joyful: -

Praise to the Son of God.  
May all praise, all glory, all honour,  
be given to the Son of God,  
who is blest, glorious for all ages.  
May all people exclaim: Amen! Alleluia!

His work as a preacher met with amazing success. He made some four hundred journeys on foot to northern Italy and southern France. It is said that the crowds who came to hear him on one occasion during Lent in Padua numbered thirty thousand. He reconciled people who were divided from one another or from the church. In the museum of the city of Padua is a document containing a law passed at Anthony’s urging, providing remission of debts for those who were unable to pay. In one of his prayers, he used to say: -

Fill us with your mercy, Jesus Christ, fill us with your mercy, so that we may practise compassion to ourselves and to others, neither judging nor condemning, but forgiving those who hurt us, and helping those who are in need. (From Don Mullan (ed.), *A Little Book of Saint Anthony*, The Columba Press, Dublin, 2003)

Anthony preached in France for three years, 1225-1227, principally against the Catharist heresy. His message was practical and vivid. He could be severe, too, a biographer stating that,

On one occasion, he was invited to preach at a synod at Bourges and the archbishop, Simon de Sully, presided at the council. Anthony opened his sermon with ‘Tibi loquor, cornute’ [You there, with the mitre, I’m talking to you], a public denunciation of the archbishop who had invited him which almost paralysed his hearers. A feature of his sermons was the virulence of his attacks on the secular clergy. He pitted himself also with extraordinary vehemence against the prevalent vices of his age, which were avarice, luxury and tyranny in government. (Alice Curtayne, *Saints are not Sad: Forty Biographical Portraits*, assembled by F. J. Sheed, Sheed & Ward, London, 1949, p.187)

For generations his devotees have viewed him as a character simple, sweet and meek, but the same biographer states, ‘Sweetness of disposition was not his predominant characteristic: he had a tongue that could

blister. He was bold rather than meek,...' (Curtayne, *ibid.*, p.189)

He was well recognized as a confessor, and his fellow Franciscans chose him as provincial of the friars in Northern Italy.

In his lifetime he was known principally as a preacher. It was only after his death that he became known as a miracle-worker. Of the forty-six miracles adduced in the process of his canonization, only one took place during his lifetime. A great many miracles were attributed to him, but it is difficult to distinguish fact from fantasy among them, local records sometimes claiming the same miracle for different places. However, there appears to be abundant documentary support for his miracle at Rimini, when the fish gathered near the shore as he spoke, after his congregation of Waldensians had departed, not liking what he had said.

Anthony spent his life on the move, constantly engaged in militant activity. Perhaps because of overwork, his health declined. Bloated with dropsy and ungainly in his movements, he died at Arcella near Padua on 13 June 1231, when he was not yet thirty-six years old. He had lived fifteen years with his parents, ten with the Augustinians, and eleven with the Franciscans. He was canonized by Pope Gregory IX less than a year after his death. A basilica was built in his honour in Padua, and his body was transferred there in 1263 in the presence of Saint Bonaventure. He was declared a doctor of the church in 1946. According to tradition, Anthony

should be known as Saint Anthony of Lisbon since that was his birth-place. But the Italians claimed him for themselves, and so he is usually known as Saint Anthony of Padua.

How has love for Anthony and devotion to him been so long-lasting? The popularity of other saints has come and gone; he endures. He is the saint of the people, close to them in his heart and they to him. And his appeal has been as universal as it is enduring. The city of San Antonio in Texas takes its name from him, and, in Tamil Nadu state in the south of India, there is a shrine in his honour, where fishermen of all faiths come to pray. He is known as the finder of lost objects: that comes from a time when he missed a book of the psalms very much because he had written notes and comments in the margins. He prayed for its return, and the novice who had taken it felt guilty and brought it back. The notes were subsequently published as a commentary on the psalms.

What of the story of the man in whose house he stayed seeing him at night with a radiant infant in his arms? That is how Anthony is usually represented in statues, pointing to the infant Jesus as if to say, 'It's about him, not about me. He's the one that matters.' Jesus is the beginning, the middle and the end of the Christian faith. It is not primarily a set of ideas, a doctrine, a series of precepts or observances, or an institution. It is about a person - Jesus Christ. If Anthony points us to Him, that is what he means to do.



A prayer to Saint Anthony: -

O holy Saint Anthony, gentlest and kindest of saints, your love for God and for his creatures made you worthy, when on earth, to possess miraculous powers. Encouraged by this thought, I earnestly ask you to obtain for me my request [*pray in silence for a while.*] O gentle and loving Saint Anthony, whose heart was ever full of human sympathy, speak my petition into the ears of the infant Jesus, who loved to be enfolded in your arms, and the gratitude of my heart will ever be yours. Amen.

## **SAINT ROMUALD: 19 June**

Romuald was born in Ravenna, Italy, about 950, to an aristocratic family. According to early accounts, he indulged in debauchery as a young man. (It has to be said, though, that hagiographers sometimes overstate the sins of a saint's youth in order to make his or her conversion seem more dramatic: Saint Francis of Assisi is a case in point.) After seeing his father kill an opponent in a duel, twenty-year old Romuald was shocked, and fled to the church of Sant' Apollinare-in-Classa to pray and reflect. After some indecision, he became a monk there, but, led by a desire for a stricter way of life, he withdrew after three years to become a hermit on an island, with an older monk, Marinus, as his spiritual director.

Soon, it seems, Romuald acquired a reputation for holiness. His first follower was Peter I, Doge (Duke, Duce) of Venice, who abdicated his office to join him. The three men went to a hermitage beside a monastery in the Pyrenees, not far from Barcelona, in Spain. This was a meeting point of three traditions: the Benedictine, influenced by the reforms of Cluny; the Irish eremitical; and that of the Iberian Peninsula. Romuald integrated these into his own monastic life. He lived by a long-standing Christian tradition of quiet, receptive prayer, like that of the Orthodox Hesychasts.

Romuald returned to Italy after his father became a monk to help him in his vocation. Some time later, the

Holy Roman Emperor, Otto III, persuaded him, against his better judgment, to become abbot of a community in need of reform. After a year of effort, Romuald admitted failure: the community resisted him. He resigned, throwing his abbot's staff in frustration at Otto's feet, and returning to the eremitical life. However, he helped establish new monasteries and hermitages throughout Italy. The best known were at Camaldoli in Tuscany, founded about 1023, and from which his order, the Camaldolese, takes its name, and at Vallombrosa. Romuald died on 19 June, probably in 1027, at Val di Castro, near Fabriano, Italy. Saint Peter Damian wrote his biography.

Romuald used to say: -

‘Sit in your cell as in paradise. Put the whole world behind you and forget it. Watch your thoughts like a good fisherman watching for fish. The path you must follow is in the Psalms - never leave it.’

‘If you have just come to the monastery, and in spite of your good will you cannot accomplish what you want, take every opportunity you can to sing the Psalms in your heart and to understand them with your mind. If your mind wanders as you read, do not give up; hurry back and apply your mind to the words once more.’

‘Realize above all that you are in God's presence.’

## **SAINT ALOYSIUS GONZAGA: 21 June**

Aloysius Gonzaga was born the eldest son of a noble family on 9 March 1568, at their castle in northern Italy. His father assumed that he would become a soldier, as the family was constantly involved in the frequent local wars. His military training started at an early age, but he was also educated in languages and other subjects. At the age of eight, he was sent to the court of Duke Francesco de Medici for further education. While there, he fell ill with a kidney disease which was to trouble him all his life. While ill, he read lives of the saints and spent much time in prayer. He is said to have taken a vow of chastity at the age of nine; it was something he always valued highly. At eleven, he was sent to the court of the Duke of Mantua, but was repelled by the wasteful, frivolous, and sometimes violent life-style of the place.

At the age of twelve, he returned home. There he met Cardinal (later Saint) Charles Borromeo who found out that he had not yet made his first Communion and gave it to him. After reading a book about Jesuit missionaries in India, Aloysius felt that he wanted to become one. He practised by giving catechism classes to boys in the town. He often visited the nearby Capuchin friary and adopted an ascetic lifestyle. Influenced by the writings of the Spanish Dominican mystic, Louis of Granada, he began the practice of mental prayer and used to do it for up to five hours a day, while also studying philosophy. He was still only thirteen.

The family was called to Spain in 1581 by Empress Maria of Austria, and Aloysius became a page at her court. But he started thinking about joining a religious order. He considered the Capuchins, but had a Jesuit confessor in Madrid, and so decided to join the Society of Jesus instead. His mother agreed to this, but his father was furious. In 1584, the family returned to Italy. Aloysius still wanted to become a priest, but several members of his family tried to dissuade him. When they realized they could not achieve this, they tried to persuade him to become a diocesan priest and to arrange a bishopric for him. If he became a Jesuit, he would renounce any right to family property or to status in society. His family was afraid of this, but their attempts to dissuade him failed; he was not interested in power, position, or possessions, but wanted to become a missionary.

In November 1585, Aloysius gave up all rights of inheritance to the family estate, and had this confirmed by the emperor. He went to Rome and was accepted into the Jesuit novitiate. He was asked to moderate his asceticism somewhat in order to be more sociable with the other novices. He took recreation with the lay brothers in preference to the nobility, as his family believed he should.

His health continued to cause problems. In addition to kidney disease, he also suffered from a skin problem, from headaches and insomnia. He began his studies, but continued to be ill. In 1587, he took the three religious

vows, then went on to minor orders, and started studying theology for the priesthood.

In 1591, a plague broke out in Rome. The Jesuits opened a hospital and Aloysius volunteered. He was allowed to work in a ward where there were no plague victims, as the Jesuits were afraid of losing him. But, as it turned out, a man on his ward was infected, and Aloysius contracted the disease. It seemed that he would die in a short time, and he was given the last rites. But, to everyone's surprise, he recovered, even though his general health was worse than ever. While he was ill, he spoke several times with his confessor, Cardinal Bellarmine, and told him that he would die on the Octave of the feast of Corpus Christi. On that day, which fell on 21 June in 1591, he seemed well in the morning, but insisted that he would die before the day was out. The cardinal gave him the last sacraments and recited the prayers for the dying. Aloysius died just before midnight, at the age of twenty-three.

It has been said of him that, in his concern to remain chaste, he never looked any woman in the face, not even his mother. One hopes that this was not true. But he did show clear thinking and strength of character in holding out against his family's and class's expectations that he would conform to an aristocratic lifestyle which was only marginally Christian.

He was canonized in 1726, along with another Jesuit novice, Stanislaus Kostka, and is the patron saint of students and of victims of plague.

## SAINT PAULINUS of NOLA: 22 June

Paulinus was born about 354 at Bordeaux, France, into a pagan family. He was a wealthy man, a senator, and a Latin poet. As a child he visited the shrine of Saint Felix of Nola, near Naples, Italy. About 380, the Roman Emperor Gratian appointed him governor of Campania in southern Italy, but Gratian's assassination shortly thereafter led to Paulinus' return to Bordeaux.

There he married a Spanish Christian woman named Therasia. Paulinus himself became a Christian, being baptized about 389 by Saint Delfinus, bishop of Bordeaux. Shortly afterwards, he and his wife moved to their estate in Spain. When they lost their first child, a boy, only eight days after his birth, they decided to live a secluded life of continence. Their devotional life was fostered by the practice of *Lectio Divina*. They settled at Nola, near Naples, where Paulinus wrote poems in honor of a local saint, the third century martyr, Felix, to whom he attributed his conversion. He and Therasia rebuilt a church in Felix's honour.

A long-standing friend and fellow poet, Ausonius, a pagan, felt betrayed by Paulinus' conversion, saying that his poetry would be lost in the Christian faith and also that helping the poor was a waste of money. But Paulinus continued to write poetry on Christian themes, especially in honour of Saint Felix. He said, 'To me faith is the only art, and Christ is my poetry,' and he spoke of the poor as his 'patrons.' His renunciation of career and

wealth in favour of a life of asceticism and service to the poor was held up as an example by many of his contemporaries, including Saints Augustine, Jerome, Martin of Tours, and Ambrose. Paulinus may have been influential in persuading Saint Augustine to write his celebrated *Confessions*.

During these years he corresponded with Christian leaders throughout the empire, among them Saint Jerome, and some fifty of these letters are extant. In one of these, Jerome wrote in affirmation of Paulinus' work for the poor, saying, 'Of what profit are walls glittering with jewels while Christ dies of hunger in poverty?' (Letter to Paulinus, 58.7.1)

Paulinus' wife died some time between 408 and 413. After her death, he was ordained priest, despite reluctance on his part, on Christmas day 393 or 394, by the bishop of Barcelona. However, there was some debate as to whether this was canonical since he had been ordained without first receiving minor orders. About 410, he became bishop of Nola, and spent much of his personal wealth on the church and the city. He participated in several church councils, was invited to help resolve the disputed election of Pope Boniface I, and investigated movements such as Pelagianism.

Paulinus died at Nola on 22 June 431. The following year a priest, Uranus, wrote an account of his death and character, *On the Death of Paulinus*.

Here is one of his poems: -



This temple has two porches,  
as the church has two testaments.  
But the temple and the church  
are each blessed with one font.  
The old law gives strength to the new,  
the new completes the old.  
In the old was hope,  
in the new is faith.  
But old and new are joined by the grace of Christ,  
which is why a font has been put in the place  
between.

He also wrote, 'I pray that we may be found worthy to be cursed, censured, and ground down, and even put to death in the name of Jesus Christ, as long as Christ himself is not put to death in us.'

In a letter to Sulpicius Severus he wrote, 'Let us listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes.' (Letter 23.36, CSEL 29, 193)

In another letter, he said, 'There is a freedom that is baser than slavery, and that is freedom from justice.' (Letter 34.2-4; CSEL 29.306)

## SAINT JOHN FISHER: 22 June

John Fisher, born in 1469, was ordained priest in 1491, and, in 1494, became master of Michaelhouse College in Cambridge University. At about the same time he became chaplain to the mother of King Henry VII. In 1504, he was appointed bishop of Rochester and elected chancellor of Cambridge. He is said to have been tutor to Prince, later King, Henry VIII. He has been named, but without proof, as the author of the royal treatise against Luther, published in 1521, entitled *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, which won Henry the title *Defender of the Faith* from the pope. Before this, Fisher had denounced abuses in the church and urged reform.

When the question arose of Henry VIII's divorce from his wife Queen Catherine, Fisher became the queen's supporter and counsellor. He appeared on her behalf in court, where he startled his hearers by the directness of his language and by declaring that, like Saint John the Baptist, he was ready to die for the indissolubility of marriage. This was reported to Henry VIII, who was so angered by it that he wrote an address to the court in answer to the bishop's speech. Fisher's copy of this still exists, with his hand-written notes in the margin which show how little he feared the king. The removal of the case to Rome brought Fisher's personal share in it to an end, but the king's anger towards him remained.

In 1529, the *Long Parliament* began a series of encroachments on the church. As a member of the House

of Lords, Fisher warned that such acts could only end in the destruction of the church in England. On this, the Commons complained to the king that the bishop had disparaged Parliament. Henry summoned Fisher, demanding an explanation. When this was given, Henry declared himself satisfied, leaving it to the Commons to declare that the explanation was unsatisfactory, so that Henry could pose as the magnanimous sovereign instead of Fisher's enemy.

Henry, described by one historian as “a monster of pride and selfishness”, was capable of being ruthless to any opponent. When Catholics in Cornwall refused to accept the new Anglican Order of Service in place of the Mass, he raised an army of mercenaries on the continent, and slaughtered them. Eamon Duffy, professor of history at Cambridge, in his book *The Stripping of the Altars*, has shown how deeply integrated the church was in the life and culture of England. It was popular, and England was known as the Dowry of Mary.

There was another dimension also. Henry was used by some of England's leading families, such as the Cecils and the Spensers, who saw his conflict with the church as an opportunity for their enrichment in the form of a land-grab. They supported Henry, and in return were awarded land confiscated from the church.

In 1530, continued encroachments on the church moved the bishops of Rochester, Bath, and Ely to appeal to Rome. The king responded by forbidding such appeals, and the three bishops were arrested, though

released after a few months. A fine of £1,000,000 was imposed on the clergy to purchase the king's pardon for having recognized Cardinal Wolsey as the pope's legate; and at the same time to acknowledge Henry as Supreme Head of the Church in England, to which the phrase, 'so far as God's law permits,' was added, through Fisher's efforts.

A few days later, several of the bishop's servants were taken ill after eating some porridge, and two died. This was seen as an attempt on the bishop's life, but he had not eaten any of it. To disarm suspicion, the king not only expressed indignation at the crime, but caused an act of Parliament to be passed, whereby poisoning was to be considered treason and the person guilty of it boiled to death. This sentence was carried out, but it did not prevent what seems to have been another attempt on Fisher's life soon afterwards.

Matters now moved quickly. Fisher preached publicly against the king's divorce. In January 1533, Henry went through a secret marriage with Anne Boleyn. Cranmer was ordained archbishop of Canterbury early in 1534, and, a week later, Fisher was arrested. It seems that this was done to prevent him opposing the divorce which Cranmer pronounced in May, or the coronation of Anne Boleyn which followed in June. Fisher was freed within a fortnight of the coronation, with no charge made against him. However, in 1534, a bill of attainder was passed against him. By it, Fisher lost his estate and was imprisoned for an indefinite period. Subsequently, a pardon was granted to him on payment of a fine of £300.

Parliament then passed the Act of Succession, calling, under pain of treason, for acknowledgement of the children of Henry and Anne as legitimate heirs to the throne. Fisher refused the oath and was sent to the Tower of London. Efforts were made to induce him to submit, but without effect, and he was again found guilty of treason, and the see of Rochester declared vacant. A letter exists, written from the Tower by the bishop to Thomas Cromwell, which records the severity of his imprisonment and the suffering he endured.

Pope Paul III created Fisher cardinal, apparently to persuade Henry to treat him less severely. The effect was the opposite. Henry forbade the cardinal's hat to be brought to England, saying that he would send the cardinal's head to Rome instead. Fisher was again charged with treason, for denying that the king was supreme head of the church. He was declared guilty, and condemned to be hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn, but the manner of execution was changed, and instead he was beheaded on Tower Hill.

He met death with a calm courage which impressed all present. His dead body was stripped and thrown naked into a grave. His head was impaled on London Bridge, but its lifelike appearance drew so much attention that it was thrown into the River Thames. John Fisher was canonized in 1935.

## SAINT THOMAS MORE: 22 June

Thomas More was born in London in 1478. He lived near a Carthusian monastery outside the city and joined the monks' spiritual exercises. Although he admired their piety, he chose the life of a layman. He married Jane Colt in 1505, and they had four children. She died in 1511, and he then married Alice Middleton. They did not have children, although More raised Alice's daughter from her previous marriage as his own. He was an affectionate father who wrote letters to his children when he was away, and encouraged them to write to him. He took a serious interest in the education of women, something highly unusual at the time. Believing women to be as capable of academic achievement as men, he insisted upon giving his daughters the same education as his son. His success in educating them was an example to other families.

In 1504, he was elected to parliament. From 1510, he served as undersheriff of London, where he earned a reputation as an honest and effective public servant. He was appointed privy councillor in 1514 and to the exchequer in 1521. As adviser to Henry VIII, he became influential in government. In 1523, he became Speaker of the House of Commons, and in 1525, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

More wrote many books, including the novel, *Utopia*, about an imaginary country where people elect their rulers, property is held in common, people work only

nine hours a day, education is provided publicly, cruel punishments are unknown, and there is freedom of worship. After Martin Luther began to attack Catholic doctrine, Henry VIII responded with his *Defence of the Seven Sacraments*, written with help from More (and perhaps Bishop John Fisher). In light of this, Pope Leo X awarded Henry the title *Defender of the Faith*. Luther then attacked Henry. At Henry's request, More, in 1523, wrote the *Reply to Luther*. In keeping with the practice of the time, this used strongly polemical language. In 1528, More produced another religious polemic, *A Dialogue concerning Heresies*, which stated that the Catholic Church was the one true church, whose authority had been established by Christ, and that its traditions and practices were valid. Then, in 1531, William Tyndale published *An Answer unto Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*. More replied with his *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*. These literary battles convinced More, who valued structure, tradition, and order in society, that Lutheranism and the Protestant Reformation in general were dangerous, not only to the Catholic faith but to the stability of society as a whole. He also wrote *A Treatise on the Passion*, *A Treatise to receive the Blessed Body*, and *On the Agony of Christ*, written in the Tower of London before his execution.

In 1529, after Wolsey fell from favour, More became Chancellor. Devoted to the king, he co-operated with the new policy, denouncing Wolsey in parliament and agreeing that the marriage of Henry to Catherine had been unlawful. But as Henry began to deny papal authority, More's qualms grew.

More saw the Reformation as a threat to the unity of church and society. He helped Wolsey prevent Lutheran books being imported into England, spied on and investigated suspected Protestants, and arrested anyone holding books supporting the Reformation. He suppressed Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament, and authorized the burning of six heretics at the stake.

As the conflict between the king and the papacy reached its climax, More remained steadfast in supporting the pope. In 1530, he refused to sign a letter by leading English churchmen and aristocrats asking Pope Clement VII to annul Henry's marriage to Catherine, and he quarrelled with Henry VIII over the heresy laws. In 1531, Henry isolated More by removing clergy who supported the pope from senior positions in the church. In addition, he forbade appeals to Rome. Realizing his isolation, More attempted to resign after being forced to take an oath declaring the king the Supreme Head of the English Church 'as far as the law of Christ allows,' but he refused to take the oath without this qualification. With his supporters in the royal court disappearing, he asked the king in 1532 to relieve him of office, saying that he was ill. Henry agreed.

In 1533, More refused to attend the coronation of Anne Boleyn as queen. Technically, this was not an act of treason, as he had written to Henry acknowledging her queenship and expressing his wish for the king's happiness and her health. However, his refusal to attend was widely interpreted as a snub to Anne. Henry acted



against him. He was charged with accepting bribes, but these were dismissed for lack of evidence.

In April 1534, More was told to swear allegiance to the Act of Succession. He accepted parliament's right to declare Anne Boleyn queen, but refused the oath. Furthermore, he publicly refused to uphold Henry's annulment from Catherine. Henry had him imprisoned in the Tower of London. There he wrote a devotional work, the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*.

In July 1535, he was charged with treason for denying the validity of the Act of Succession. He was condemned, largely on perjured evidence, was sentenced to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, but the king commuted this to decapitation. He was executed on 6 July 1535. As he mounted the steps to the scaffold, he said, 'I pray you, Mr Lieutenant, see me safe up. As for my coming down, I can shift for myself.' On the scaffold he declared, 'I die the king's good servant, but God's first.' He was canonized in 1935, and, in 2000, declared patron saint of statesmen and politicians.

(See the Note on the Just Ruler)

## **SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST, HIS BIRTH:**

**24 June**

John was a cousin of Jesus, about six months older than he. Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, the mother of John, were cousins. John was called the Baptist because he baptized Jesus. (Mark 1.9-11) He was the son of Zachary and Elizabeth, who were 'righteous before God.' (Luke 1.6) In his mother's womb, he recognized Jesus as saviour (Luke 1.39-45); his birth was accompanied by great signs (Luke 1.57-66); he lived a life of penance in the desert (Luke 1.80; Matthew 3.4). He was called a 'prophet of the Most High' (Luke 1.76); the word of God descended on him (Luke 3.2); he went through the whole of the Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Luke 3.3) He was like a new Elijah, preparing people to receive the word of God. (Luke 1.17) He baptized Jesus in the Jordan, in waters made holy by the one who was baptized. (Matthew 3.13-16; Preface 61) He told his disciples that Jesus was 'the Lamb of God,' (John 1.29) 'the Son of God,' (John 1.34), and the bridegroom of the messianic community. (John 3.28-30)

The gospel account of John's birth (Luke 1.5-24; 57-80) embodies features such as elderly parents, an angel announcing the birth in advance, and God's choosing his name. These are found also in the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Samson, and to a large extent in that of Jesus also. In each case, they are a sign that the child thus announced has a special role and significance in God's

sight. The type of literature these employ, the Hebrew *midrash*, is a way of re-interpreting an event to give it a didactic or motivational purpose. It is intended less to describe factually than to inspire. (A rabbi described the Hebrew Bible as, ‘the novel of our relationships with God.’ What counts is not what is said but what is meant. The path from text to action always goes through interpretation. All language involves interpretation; there is no such thing as un-interpreted language.) There is likely something very similar at work in the Gospel accounts of John’s martyrdom which clearly borrows substantially from a story in the book of Esther, chapters 1, 2 and 7.)

No one knows when John’s (or Jesus’s) birthdays really were, and it was never considered a matter of importance. The choice of 24 June for the liturgical celebration of John’s birthday is because it is six months (see Luke 1.26) before the eve of the birth of Jesus. The Franciscan writer, Richard Rohr, states,

It is now exactly six months until Christmas Eve, and the Christian version of the summer solstice. John the Baptist’s “birthday” is seen as the counterpart to Jesus’ birthday who is born when it appears to be winter, but light is already returning. Now, at the height of summer, we are reminded that the darkness is already returning, too. That is often the unwelcome role of the prophet, to reveal the shadow side of things when everyone is cheering and celebrating supposed success. John’s memorable statement that, “He must increase and I

must decrease” (John 3.30) was seen mirrored in the very cycles of the cosmos. Christianity does not always realize how nature-based its messages invariably are, and how we can know them just by “looking.”

John was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies about Elijah. (Matthew 17-13; Mark 9.13) He was the last of the prophets of the Old Testament, the precursor of the Messiah, the link between the Old and New Testaments. The poet William Drummond (1585-1649) described him as ‘The last and greatest Herald of Heaven’s King.’ (*Saint John Baptist*) John proclaimed Jesus and then stood aside to let him take first place, stating clearly that he himself was not the Messiah. (John 3.28)

Saint Augustine, in a homily, said,

John appears as the boundary between the two testaments, the old and the new. That he is a sort of boundary the Lord himself bears witness, when he speaks of "the law and the prophets up until John the Baptist." Thus he represents times past, and is the herald of the new era to come. As a representative of the past, he is born of aged parents. As a herald of the new era, he is declared to be a prophet while still in his mother's womb. For, when yet unborn, he leapt in his mother's womb at the arrival of blessed Mary. In that womb he had already been designated a prophet, even before he was born; it was revealed that he was to be Christ's precursor, before they ever

saw one another. These are divine happenings, going beyond the limits of our human frailty.

John, although from a priestly family, was part of the prophetic tradition in Israel. The prophets were laymen; their relationship with the priests was commonly critical. John was one among them, a man to whom spin, PR or political correctness were foreign. The prophets constantly called people to fidelity, to a greater commitment to the covenant between God and his people. They expressed that element of inbuilt self-criticism which is one of Judaism's strengths. They were hated, feared, or respected. John was

the archetype of humility, the shining light, the forerunner of Christ, the foetal prophet, the angelic messenger, the dawn before the sun, the first monk, the martyr for justice and truth. (Melanie McDonagh, "Bonfire for the Baptist," in *The Tablet*, 21 August 2004, p.2)

Jesus spoke of him as one who 'gave testimony to the truth,' (John 5.33) said he was 'a lamp alight and shining,' (John 5.35) and that, 'among those born of women no one is greater than John.' (Luke 7.28)

Preface (61) of the Mass of John the Baptist has this to say about him: -

We praise your [God the Father's] greatness as we honour the prophet who prepared the way for your

Son. You set John the Baptist apart from others,  
marking him out with special favour.  
His birth brought great rejoicing: even in the womb  
he leapt for joy, so near was humanity's salvation.  
You chose John the Baptist from all the prophets to  
show the world its redeemer, the lamb of sacrifice.  
He baptized Christ, the giver of baptism, in waters  
made holy by the one who was baptized.  
You found John worthy of a martyr's death, his last  
and greatest act of witness to your Son....

## **SAINT CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: 27 June**

Cyril was born in Egypt in 376. As a young man he entered a monastery and then became a priest. A few years later, his maternal uncle, Theophilus, became patriarch of Alexandria. Cyril's mother remained close to her brother, and Cyril benefitted from this. When Theophilus died in 412, Cyril succeeded him by hiring a mob which, in a riot, defeated one hired by his rival, Timothy. He came to office when the city was at the height of its power in the Roman Empire, a time of often violent conflict between the city's pagan, Jewish, and Christian inhabitants.

Cyril ordered the churches of the Novatians, a Christian sect, closed, and had them expelled. According to Christian sources, the Jews of Alexandria schemed against the Christians and killed many of them. In 415, Cyril personally led a huge mob through the streets of Alexandria, slaughtered several thousand Jewish men, women and children, and destroyed their synagogues. Survivors were expelled from the city where they had lived for six centuries.

Cyril exerted power that belonged to the civil officer, Orestes. He often encroached on civil authority. Monks from the desert attacked and almost killed Orestes. (They had earlier been used by Theophilus also against his opponents.)

The highly influential Alexandrian woman philosopher, Hypatia, was believed by some Christians to have persuaded Orestes to reject reconciliatory moves by Cyril, so a group of Cyril's supporters hacked her to death and burned her body. Modern studies present Hypatia's death as the result of a struggle between two Christian factions, a moderate one led by Orestes and supported by Hypatia, and an extreme one led by Cyril. It seems that her death signalled a Christian uprising against the pagan scholars of Alexandria, a centre of knowledge throughout the ancient world.

Another major conflict was between the Christian sees and theological schools of Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople. The first Council of Constantinople had given Constantinople primacy over Alexandria and Antioch. Matters came to a head in 428 when Nestorius, who came from Antioch, was made patriarch of Constantinople. He began preaching a doctrine which created confusion about the nature of Christ. As in other cases, new factors, very different from the doctrinal issue, became involved. There were clashes of authority in which Cyril claimed, probably incorrectly, to be acting with the authority of the pope. He was accused of having bribed bishops to take his part in the Council of Ephesus which met in 431 to discuss the matter. A Catholic historian says of this accusation that it 'was probably as true as it was usual.'

The conduct of the council itself was far from just. Nestorius was not present, and Cyril opened it without either the legates sent by the pope or the bishops from



Antioch, who might have been mediators. The condemnation and excommunication of Nestorius was decreed without discussion at one sitting. When the papal legates arrived, they were presented with a *fait accompli*, and accepted it.

But Cyril's actions only made matters worse, and a new council, composed of his enemies, condemned him. Emperor Theodosius arrested him, but he escaped. Having fled to Egypt, Cyril bribed Theodosius' courtiers, and sent a mob to besiege his palace. The emperor gave in, exiling Nestorius. The most lasting effect of Cyril's conduct was to permanently alienate Nestorius' followers. (They still exist today as a separate church.)

Cyril returned in triumph to Alexandria where he remained until his death in 444. But the controversies around him continued. His politics, ecclesiastical and otherwise, were deeply divisive.

Why is Cyril called a saint? Perhaps because of his theology which, once freed from ambiguities, remains of central importance to this day. He held that, in the Trinity, there was one divine essence in three distinct modes of being, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When the Son became man and entered the world, his two natures, human and divine, both remained, but united in the one person of Jesus. Cyril's concern was that there needed to be continuity between the second person, the uncreated Word, and the Word made flesh. In Jesus Christ, the divine Logos was really present in his body and in the world. One way in which Cyril

expressed this was by insisting at the Council of Ephesus that Mary should be called Mother of God, not just Mother of Jesus. He wrote,

Only one is the Son, only one is the Lord Jesus Christ, both before and after the incarnation. Indeed, the *Logos* born of God the Father was not one son and the one born of the Blessed Virgin another; but we believe that the very One who was born before the ages was also born according to the flesh and of a woman.' (First Letter to Succensus, 433 AD, in PG 77, 228-237)

Elsewhere he said, 'That anyone could doubt the right of the holy virgin to be called the mother of God fills me with astonishment. Surely she must be the mother of God if our Lord Jesus Christ is God, and she gave birth to him.'

Cyril was a prolific writer. Among his writings were commentaries on the Old Testament and Saint John's Gospel, and Dialogues on the Trinity. His writings, which fill seven volumes, do not have the accuracy of later theologians. In fact, the ambiguity of his expression was a contributing factor in the clash with Nestorius, since the latter could argue that Cyril's own position was unclear. Only a few years after Cyril's death, the church in Alexandria fell into monophysitism, and, from there, into separation from Rome. This situation, which still exists today, derived from uncertainty created by a phrase in Cyril's writings, where he wrote of 'One nature incarnate of God the Word.'

Cyril was declared a saint, that is, an example of the Christian life for others to follow, and a doctor of the church, that is, someone whose teaching has been of outstanding benefit to the church. He is counted among the Fathers of the Church. On 9 April 1944, Pope Pius XII wrote an encyclical letter, *Orientalis Ecclesiae*, on the occasion of the fifteenth centenary of his death, in which he praised him for his 'spotless life.' (n.3)

## SAINT IRENAEUS: 28 June

Irenaeus, a Greek from İzmir (then Smyrna) in present-day Turkey, was born about 135-140. Unlike most in his time, he was brought up in a Christian family rather than converting as an adult. While young, he learned from Polycarp, a disciple of John the Evangelist.

During the persecution by Emperor Marcus Aurelius, Irenaeus was a priest of the church of Lyons, France, then a part of the Roman Empire. He succeeded the martyred Saint Pothinus to become the second bishop of the city. During the peace which followed the persecution, he engaged in pastoral and missionary work.

He was an early church father and apologist, and his writings were influential in the development of early Christian theology. The most famous of these was *Against Heresies* (c.180), a detailed attack on Gnosticism, which was then a threat to the church. According to scholars, the findings at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945, have shown Irenaeus' description of Gnosticism to be largely inaccurate and polemical in nature, but others disagree. He also wrote *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching*, which seems to have been a book of instruction for recent Christian converts; it has been described as the first catechism. As one of the first great theologians, he emphasized the episcopate, scripture, and tradition.

Before Irenaeus, Christians differed as to which gospel they preferred. Christians of Asia Minor preferred the Gospel of John, while the Gospel of Matthew was the most popular overall. Irenaeus asserted that four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, were canonical, and he regarded as scripture not only the Old Testament but most of the books now known as the New Testament, while excluding many works, a large number of them by Gnostics, that flourished in the second century and claimed scriptural authority. He pointed to scripture as a proof of orthodox Christianity against heresies. He exercised wide influence on the immediately following generation, and both Hippolytus and Tertullian drew on his writings.

Against the Gnostics, who claimed to possess a secret oral tradition from Jesus himself, he maintained that the bishops in different cities were known as far back as the Apostles - and none of them was a Gnostic - and they provided the only safe guide to the interpretation of scripture. With the lists of bishops to which Irenaeus referred, the later doctrine of apostolic succession could be linked. This was important to establish a chain of orthodoxy. His point when refuting the Gnostics was that all of the apostolic churches had preserved the same traditions and teachings in many independent streams. It was the unanimous agreement between these that showed the faith current in those churches to be true. His writings, along with those of Clement and Ignatius, are taken as among the earliest signs of the developing doctrine of the primacy of the Roman see.

The central point of Irenaeus' theology is the unity and goodness of God. He held that the world was intentionally designed by God as a difficult place, where human beings are forced to make moral decisions, as only in this way could they mature as moral agents. Similarly, suffering and death appear as evils, but, without them, we could never come to know God.

For Irenaeus, the high point in salvation history is the coming of Jesus. He believed that Jesus would have come anyway, even if humanity had not sinned. But the fact that humanity did sin determines his role as saviour. Irenaeus conceives of our salvation as coming about through the incarnation of God as a man.

Irenaeus set out an account of Mary's role in the economy of salvation: by obeying, she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.

Irenaeus died about 202, and was buried under the church of Saint John in Lyons, which was later renamed in his honour. The tomb and his remains were destroyed by Huguenots in 1562.

Here are some extracts from his writings: -

‘Just as bread that comes from the earth, after God's blessing has been invoked upon it, is no longer ordinary bread, but Eucharist, formed of two things, the one earthly and the other heavenly: so too our bodies, which partake of the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, but

possess the hope of resurrection.’ (*Against Heresies*, 4.18.4-5)

‘Christ and the Holy Spirit... are the two hands of God.’ (*Against Heresies*, 4.28.4)

‘A person fully alive is the glory of God; moreover the person's life is the vision of God. If God's revelation through creation has already obtained life for all the beings that dwell on earth, how much more will the Word's manifestation of the Father obtain life for those who see God.’ The ultimate purpose of creation is that God 'who is the creator of all things may at last become “all in all”, thus simultaneously assuring his own glory and our happiness.’ (*Against Heresies*, 4.20.7: SC 648)

‘Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, out of his boundless love, became what we are so that he might make us what he himself is.’

## **SAINTS PETER AND PAUL, APOSTLES: 29 June**

### **Simon Peter**

Simon, the son of John or Jonah, was from the village of Bethsaida in Galilee. A married man, a fisherman by trade, with his brother Andrew, he was called by Jesus to follow him, and become ‘fishers of men.’ (Mark 1.16-17; Matthew 4.18-19) Andrew then went and called Simon, saying, ‘We have found the Messiah,’ and brought him to Jesus. (John 1.35-42) Simon left his nets and his father and followed Jesus. (Luke 5.4-11) Jesus later amazed Simon and his co-workers by telling them to lower their nets, whereupon they caught a large number of fish.

Simon was in a leading position among the twelve apostles and features prominently in the Gospels and the Acts. He is often mentioned as forming, with James the Elder and John, a special group within the Twelve, present at significant times when the others were absent. His mother-in-law was healed by Jesus at their home in Capernaum. (Mark 1.29-31) Jesus gave him the name of Peter (Greek), or Cephas (Aramaic), both of which mean Rock. Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah, walked on water, witnessed the transfiguration and the raising to life of the daughter of Jairus, denied Jesus three times, was restored by Jesus, preached on the day of Pentecost and spread the Gospel widely among Jews and Gentiles.



Matthew describes Peter walking on water for a moment, but beginning to sink when his faith wavered. (Matthew 14.28-31)

He denied Jesus three times, insisting that he didn't even know him. Then, in an act of repentance he made a three-fold profession of love for Jesus. (John 21.15-17) Peter shows that a person with a past can also have a future.

In Mark 8.31-33, when Jesus said that he himself 'must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again,' Peter 'took him aside and began to rebuke him.' But Jesus in turn rebuked Peter, saying, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

In a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples (Matthew 16.13-20), Jesus asks, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' The disciples give various answers. When he asks, 'Who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answers, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' In turn, Jesus declares Peter to be "blessed" for having recognized his true identity, and attributes this recognition to a divine revelation. Then Jesus says, 'On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.' A great variety of opinions exists as to the interpretation of this passage and the authority and responsibility, if any, Jesus was giving to Peter. The Orthodox see it as a statement about the faith, not about Peter, and say that the depiction of Peter as the

‘man of little faith’ in Matthew 14.31 gave him the role, not of leadership among the apostles, but that of forgiven sinner.

At the Last Supper (John 13.2-11), when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, Peter initially refused, but changed when Jesus said, ‘If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me.’(John 13.8) Peter replied, ‘Then, Lord, not only my feet but my hands and my head as well.’ (13.9)

The synoptic Gospels all say that, when Jesus was arrested, one of his companions cut off the ear of a servant of the High Priest. John includes this, adding that it was Peter who did it, and Malchus was the servant. (18.10) Luke adds that Jesus touched the ear and healed it. (22.50)

In Acts, Peter took the lead in selecting a replacement for Judas Iscariot. (1.15) With John, he was twice brought before the Sanhedrin and defied it. (4.7-22; 5.18-22) After working to establish the church of Antioch, he went on missionary journeys to Lydda, Joppa and Caesarea (9.32-10.2), and favoured the evangelization of the Gentiles. Paul affirms that Peter had the special charge of being apostle to the Jews, just as he, Paul, was apostle to the Gentiles.

The New Testament says nothing directly about a link between Peter and Rome, but an early Catholic tradition supports one.

As for Peter, we have no knowledge at all of when he came to Rome and what he did there before he was martyred. Certainly he was not the original missionary who brought Christianity to Rome (and therefore not the founder of the church of Rome in that sense). There is no serious proof that he was the bishop (or local ecclesiastical officer) of the Roman church - a claim not made till the third century. Most likely he did not spend any major time at Rome before 58 when Paul wrote to the Romans, and so it may have been only in the 60's and relatively shortly before his martyrdom that Peter came to the capital. (Raymond E. Brown, and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Christianity*, Paulist Press, 1983, p. 98)

And, 'There is increasing agreement that Peter went to Rome and was martyred there, but we have no trustworthy evidence that Peter ever served as the supervisor or bishop of the local church in Rome.' (*Building Unity, Ecumenical Documents IV*, Paulist Press, 1989, p.130)

There is a tradition that Peter was crucified in Rome between 64 and 67 by Emperor Nero. (The date of 29 June was chosen for his commemoration because it was the founding day of the city of Rome, according to tradition dating from Romulus.) Origen says, 'Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he had desired to suffer,' because, it was said, he would not have considered himself worthy to die the same way as his Saviour.' Some saw that as a fulfilment of John

21.19: 'Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.'

According to Acts, chapters 1–2, 10–11, and 15, Peter had a leadership role of some kind in the early church in Jerusalem. The Orthodox recognize this, but do not consider it to have been a "princely" one of rule over his fellow apostles. The New Testament is not seen by them as supporting any extraordinary authority for Peter in faith or morals. They also hold that Peter did not act as leader at the council of Jerusalem, but simply as one speaker among several. The final decision was declared by James, the brother of the Lord. However, Catholics hold that James merely reiterated and expanded what Peter had said about the latter's earlier intervention on the inclusion of Gentiles. John Vidmar writes,

Both Catholic and Protestant scholars agree that Peter had an authority that superseded that of the other apostles. Peter is their spokesman at several events, he conducts the election of Matthias, his opinion in the debate over converting Gentiles was crucial, etc. (*The Catholic Church through the ages: a history*, pp.39–40)

Peter was rebuked by Paul for treating Gentile converts as inferior to Jewish Christians (Galatians 2.11-14) even though Peter, at the council of Jerusalem in 50, had opposed those who insisted on circumcision for Gentile converts.

Two letters are attributed to Peter in the New Testament, the first accepted universally as his, but the second in doubt. He probably influenced the development of the gospel of Mark, who was his disciple and interpreter.

Two Gospel passages have special significance regarding Peter. The first is in John 21.15-17, where Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs, feed my lambs, feed my sheep.' The second is in Matthew 16.17-20, where Jesus says,

I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

The general consensus among scholars is that these are Jesus' own words.

Some, including the Orthodox, hold that by "rock" Christ did not mean Peter, but meant either himself or the faith of his followers. The keys given to Peter in Matthew 16.18-19 are given to the body of believers in Matthew 18.18. Some Protestant scholars believe that Jesus did in fact mean to single out Peter as the rock he would build on, but did not indicate a continued succession of Peter's position.

Peter the fisherman was a man of the countryside, not very well educated, loving, generous, impulsive, and emotional. He could be the patron saint of those who say the wrong thing. His mouth often ran ahead of his mind, and more than once he put his foot in it, and was rebuked by Jesus. But he always came back and was forgiven. Nothing ever shook his love for Jesus.

In a sermon, Saint Augustine said this of Peter: -

If Christ has first chosen a man skilled in public speaking, such a man might well have said: "I have been chosen on account of my eloquence." If he had chosen a senator, the senator might have said, "I have been chosen because of my rank." If his first choice had been an emperor, the emperor surely might have said: "I have been chosen for the sake of the power I have at my disposal." Let these worthies keep quiet and defer to others; let them hold their peace for a while. I am not saying that they should be passed over or despised; I am simply asking all those who can find any grounds for pride in what they are to give way to others just a little. Christ says: Give me this fisherman, this man without education or experience, this man to whom no senator would deign to speak, not even if he were buying fish. Yes, give me him; once I have taken possession of him, it will be obvious that it is I who am at work in him. Although I meant to include senators, orators and emperors among my recruits, even when I have won over the

senator I shall still be surer of the fisherman. The senator can always take pride in what he is; so can the orator and the emperor, but the fisherman can glory in nothing except Christ alone. (Sermon 43.5-6)

**Paul:** *Early life*

Paul was born perhaps between 5 BC and 5 AD, in the trading city of Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia, in the south-east of modern Turkey. He was a Roman citizen. He was ‘circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee...’ (Philippians 3.5) His father was a Pharisee (Acts 23.6) and his mother was mentioned later as being among the Christians at Rome. He had a sister (Acts 23.16), and several of his relatives, among them Andronicus and Junia, later became Christians (Romans 16.7). He was given the name Saul in Hebrew, Paul in Latin; it was common among Jews of the empire to use their name in both forms. It was many years after his conversion, when on Cyprus, that he is first called Paul; Acts 13.9 describes him as ‘Saul also known as Paul.’ The Romanized version would have been more readily understood in his travels.

Tarsus was home to a university and it seems likely that he studied there as he seems at home in speaking about Stoic philosophy. But the dominant influence in his early education was his upbringing as a Jew in a household which had been fervently observant for

generations. (2 Timothy 1.3) He studied in Jerusalem and ‘was brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to out ancestral law, being zealous for God.’ (Acts 22.3) Gamaliel was an outstanding scholar in the gentle school of Hillel, who may even have been his father or grandfather. This course lasted three or four years and trained students in classical literature and philosophy as well as Jewish tradition. While it seems that Koine Greek was his first language, there is uncertainty as to whether he knew Hebrew.

According to 1 Corinthians 7.8, written when he was about fifty, he was unmarried, but some scholars suggest he may have married earlier. At some stage in life, he learned the trade of tent-maker. (Acts 18.3) This trade became his livelihood and the means of an important contact with two others in the trade, Prisca and Aquila, who became his co-workers in the faith and ‘risked their necks for his life.’ (Romans 16.3)

Nothing more is known of his early life until we hear of him as an active and willing persecutor of the early Christian community. Acts describes how ‘Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.’ (Acts 8.3) When Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was being stoned to death, Saul looked after the stoners’ garments and ‘approved of their killing him.’ (8.1; 22.20) Driven by zeal for God he became ‘a persecutor of the church’ (Philippians 3.6), and ‘was



violently persecuting the church and was trying to destroy it.’ (Galatians 1.13)

### *Conversion*

In pursuit of this goal, Paul set out for Damascus about the year 35; (*pace* Caravaggio, there is no mention of a horse.) There are three accounts of his conversion in Acts: 9.1-31, 22.1-22, and 26.9-24. He tells how the risen Christ appeared to him: -

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads. I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The Lord answered, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting...’ (Acts 26.14-15)

Though blinded, Saul continued to Damascus where he was healed by Ananias. (Acts 22.13) Paul had never seen Jesus, but he says of this experience that ‘God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me, through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me’ (Galatians 1.15-16), and that Christ had appeared to him also, last of all, as to one untimely born. (See 1 Corinthians 15.8) He became convinced that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. This was the great turning point for him, changing him from persecutor to promoter. He began to preach that Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 9.20), and that, through him, a new covenant had come into place which was open to all people. His life as an apostle moved into two great phases: his three missionary journeys, and his letters.

### *Missionary journeys*

Paul's *first* missionary journey began under the leadership of Barnabas as described in Acts 13. It was Barnabas who had introduced Paul to the apostles in Jerusalem after his conversion. (Acts 9.26-27) they went first to Cyprus, Barnabas' home country, then to Anatolia (in modern Turkey), and then back to Antioch where the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11.26) and which was a strong centre of the Christian faith with many converts (Acts 13.1). It became the base of their operations. The wording of Acts suggests a gradual shift of leadership from Barnabas to Paul (e.g., 13.13, 14.1).

It was while they were at Antioch that a change of immense significance took place. In the face of constant opposition from Jews and open welcome from Gentiles, the two men spoke out, saying: -

It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us... (Acts 13.46-47)

There was a major issue under discussion in Jerusalem between 48 and 50 (Acts 15.1-35), namely, the admission of Gentiles to the community of faith. All were agreed that they should be admitted, but there was disagreement as to the basis for admission. Some said they should be required to observe the law of Moses, including circumcision for men. Others saw that as a

basic misunderstanding of the meaning of who Jesus was and what he had done. Peter said,

Why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will. (Acts 15.10-11)

Faith in Jesus, not observance of the law of Moses, was to be the basis of admission to the Christian community. It was a monumental decision.

Paul became the Apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 1.5; 11.13; Galatians 2.8), rescuing the Christian community from the risk of becoming a mere sect within Judaism and putting it on the map internationally. Thus the church became catholic. (Greek, *universal*)

Probably after the Jerusalem meeting, Paul began his *second* missionary journey. But he and Barnabas fell out over whether to take John Mark with them, so they went separate ways. John Mark went with Barnabas, while Silas went with Paul. (See Acts 15.36-40) They went to Syria and Cilicia (in modern Turkey), including the towns of Derbe and Lystra where they met Timothy who was to become an important future disciple and apostle. In all this 'the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily.' (Acts 16.5) Paul went on to Athens where he preached in the Areopagus, only to be laughed at as a fool when he spoke of the

resurrection. About 50-52, Paul lived in Corinth where he met two women, Priscilla and Aquila, who became strong supporters and helpers of his, especially in Ephesus where they founded what was to become a thriving Christian community.

On his *third* missionary journey, Paul went through Galatia and Phrygia before going on to spend three years in Ephesus. While there he wrote several of his letters, including two to the Corinthians. He travelled extensively in the Balkans and Asia Minor, founding new churches or encouraging established ones. He continued to experience opposition from Jews and this resulted in his having to leave Ephesus. He returned to Jerusalem where ‘the brothers welcomed us warmly.’ (Acts 21.17)

### *Sufferings and death*

Once again, opposition from Jews caused him to be arrested (Acts 21.27-36), and then brought before the Roman governor Felix to stand trial. A common criticism among them was that Paul was down-playing the Torah. He was. But he stood up for himself against his critics, writing to the Corinthians: -

I am still more [than my critics], with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, far worse beatings, and numerous brushes with death.

Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes minus one.

Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I passed a night and a day on the deep;

on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own race, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers;

in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst, through frequent fasting, through cold and exposure.

And apart from these things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is led to sin, and I am not indignant?

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

The God and Father of the Lord Jesus knows, he who is blessed forever, that I do not lie.

At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus, in order to seize me, but I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands. (2 Corinthians 11.-23-33)

A plot to kill him led to his escape to Caesarea where he spent two years in prison before going to Rome to be tried before the emperor. (Acts 22.22-26.32) He spent some time in Malta on the way there and was received by the people with 'unusual kindness.' (Acts 28.2) He arrived in Rome about 60 AD. He stayed in lodgings there for two years and used it as an opportunity to

preach to local Jews. (Acts 28.11-30) His letter to the Romans was written several years before this.

There is no certainty about Paul's death, though there is a very long-standing tradition that he was executed by beheading about 67 AD. His conversion is recalled in the liturgy on 25 January. He is probably the greatest of the apostles.

### *Writings*

Fourteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament have traditionally been attributed to Paul, and about half of the Acts of the Apostles deals with his life and works, though it does not refer to his letters in any way. Seven of the fourteen are universally regarded as Pauline - Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon. The pastoral letters - 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus - in their content suggest a time later than Paul's, and also display a fussy unPauline concern that the church be well thought of. Ephesians, despite its title, is regarded as being addressed to the whole church. Along with Colossians and 2 Thessalonians, it is widely thought to have been written by some of Paul's followers, drawing on his sermons and writings, perhaps including some since lost. The letter to the Hebrews is regarded as not having come from Paul.

Some letters are in response to questions put by Christian communities he had founded or visited and were driven by problems that had arisen among them. In them, Paul clearly recognizes different levels of

authority - precept, exhortation or custom. For example:

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- 'This is what I received from the Lord and what I also passed on to you...' (1 Corinthians 11.23) Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 7.10, he says, 'To the married I give this command – not I but the Lord – that the wife should not separate from her husband.' Paul invokes the highest authority in speaking of the Eucharist and of marriage.
- In regard to some sexual matters he says, 'To the rest I say – I and not the Lord - ....' (1 Corinthians 7.12), and 'This I say by way of concession, not command.... But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind.' (1 Corinthians 7.6-7)
- Matters of minor importance, such as women's headdress, he treats as a question of custom. (1 Corinthians 11.16)

The letters were likely written before the Gospels; the high Christology of Paul's confirmed letters predates them. This may surprise us as they are printed after the Gospels in the New Testament and they describe events which follow the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul never met Jesus and quotes him only once in his writings, with a saying not known from any other source. But he refers with directness and authority to the institution of the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11.17-34, and to the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. His letters have been and still are highly influential among all

Christian denominations, giving, as they do, the fundamentals of the Christian life and of what it means.

The principal focus of Paul's writings is the death, resurrection and universal lordship of Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ give the believer a share in the salvation Jesus won for us by his death on the cross which cancelled the guilt of human sin. The resurrection is the source of Christians' hope and gives meaning to their life. Believers are *in Christ*, should live a holy life, and will live with him forever. He wrote, 'if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.' (1 Corinthians 15.14, 19)

Paul is shown from Acts and his letters to be a man wholly dedicated to God. Jesus the Christ he saw as having the attributes of the Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible, and he gave himself to his service with everything he had. He was passionate – he fought with almost everyone. He was witty, urbane, and proud of his Roman citizenship and origins in Tarsus. He could be emotional, harsh and argumentative. But he subordinated his life to the mission God had given him and he died for it.

What Peter and Paul had in common was a complete commitment to Jesus, intense loyalty to him and a desire to tell people about him. Whatever their differences, that was what they shared. They paid the price for it, being martyred in Rome about the year 67. They demonstrate



that there is room for diversity in the community of faith,  
as long as there is loyalty to Jesus.

## **THE EARLY MARTYRS of ROME: 30 June**

The early martyrs of the church of Rome died for the faith between the years 64 and 303 during persecutions by the emperors Nero, Severus Alexander, Marcus Aurelius, Gallienus, Diocletian and Claudius II Gothicus. They used to be honoured in separate celebrations, but, in 1969, were all brought under the one heading. Their memory is recalled and honoured annually on the day after Saints Peter and Paul's day.

A substantial proportion of the martyrs were Roman soldiers. Some were executed for refusing to hand over copies of the scriptures to the imperial authorities, others for refusing to offer incense to the Roman gods. Two soldiers based in Syria who refused to offer incense had their sandals nailed to their feet and were then ordered on a long march, during which they died. Pope Saint Clement I makes reference to Roman soldiers in his *Letter to the Corinthians*, chapter 3.

Fuller information about the martyrs is given by the Roman historian, Tacitus, in his *Annals* (15.4), where he describes what followed the burning of Rome, 19-27 July 64, as a result of which only four of the city's fourteen districts remained intact. The people blamed Emperor Nero, and he, in turn, blamed the Christians. Sometimes Christians were killed as atheists, which they were, in the sense that they denied the existence of the Roman gods.

Tacitus wrote, ‘Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Chrestians [sic] by the populace.’ The “abominations” for which the Christians were hated seem to have been their supposed cannibalism, arising perhaps from a misunderstanding of the Eucharist.

Chrestus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.

An immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or doomed to the flames and burned, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. (*Annals* 15.4)

Not all Christians stood firm in the face of the threat of torture and death. Some, driven by fear, offered incense to the gods and survived. What to do about such people became a major source of division in the church, with a priest Novatian advocating a hard and unsympathetic

attitude, while Cornelius the bishop and most of the Roman clergy took a more lenient view.

(See also *Why did the Roman Empire persecute Christians?*)

## SAINT THOMAS, APOSTLE: 3 July

Thomas the apostle was called the Twin. (John 11.16) His name comes from the Aramaic word for twin: Thoma. We do not know whose twin he was. He features in two incidents in the Gospel. When Lazarus has just died, the apostles didn't want to go back to Judea, because people there had attempted to stone Jesus, but Thomas said, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.' (John 11.16) Later, he doubted the resurrection of Jesus and demanded to touch his wounds before being convinced. But, on placing his fingers in the wounds, he said, 'My Lord and my God.' (John 20.24-29)

*A homily by Pope Saint Gregory the Great (26.7-9): -*

What conclusion, dear people, do you come to? [about Thomas.] Surely it was not by chance that this chosen disciple was missing in the first place? [See John 20.24-29] Or that on his return he heard, that hearing he doubted, that doubting he touched, and touching he believed? It was by divine dispensation and not by chance that things so fell out. God's mercy worked wonderfully, for when that doubting disciple touched his Master's wounded flesh he cured the wounds of our disbelief. His skepticism was more advantageous to us than the faith of the disciples who believed. Inasmuch as he came to believe by actually touching we can lay aside all doubt, for our faith is made whole. So this doubting disciple, who actually touched, became a

witness to the reality of the resurrection. (From *The Divine Office*, Vol. III, pp. 93\*-94\*)

Thomas came to understand that it really was Jesus who stood before him, neither a ghost, nor some form of wish-fulfilment, nor believing what one wants to believe, nor an exercise in deluded imagination, but flesh, blood and bones, bearing unmistakably the wounds inflicted on Jesus at his crucifixion. His response to this was to exclaim, 'My Lord and my God!' (John 20.28) This powerful profession of faith led Jesus to add the thought which includes a blessing, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.' (John 20.29)

Thomas was perhaps the only apostle who went outside the Roman Empire to preach the Gospel, if the traditions we have about him are correct. According to an early third-century Syriac work known as the *Acts of Thomas*, he is said to have gone as a missionary first to Edessa in Iraq, and from there to India, in 52 AD, where he worked among the Jewish diaspora in the territories of two kings, one in the north called Gundaphorus, the other in the south called Mahadwa. He became known as Thomas the Believer.

According to the *Acts*, his ministry in the north resulted in many conversions, including the king and his brother. Although little is known of the immediate growth of the church, second century reports state that there were Christian tribes in North India claiming to have been converted by Thomas, and to have books and relics as evidence. By the third century, there were Christian bishops in northwest India, Afghanistan and Baluchistan in Pakistan, with laypeople and clergy alike engaging in missionary activity.

Today the Mar Thoma Church, or 'Church of Thomas' maintains its identity as his foundation along the Malabar coast of Kerala in southwest India. The celebrated nineteenth-century Irish Indologist, Vincent Arthur Smith, wrote,

It must be admitted that a personal visit of the apostle Thomas to South India was easily feasible in the traditional belief that he came by way of Socotra [Yemen], where an ancient Christian settlement

undoubtedly existed. I am now satisfied that the Christian church of South India is extremely ancient.

Egyptian and Roman trade with India by land and sea flourished in the first century. The discovery of large hoards of Roman coins, and the remains of Roman trading posts testify to the frequency of that trade. In addition, thriving Jewish colonies were to be found at the various trading centres. Jews continue to reside in Kerala till today, tracing their ancient history. There are no circumstantial reasons why Thomas could not have travelled to India in the first century. His visit is a most plausible explanation for the early appearance of the church there. Moreover, there is a wealth of confirmatory information in Syriac writings, in liturgical books and calendars of the church of the East, and in the writings of the Fathers, the calendars, the sacramentaries, and the martyrologies of the Roman, Greek and Ethiopian churches.

Critical historians, perhaps with some not uncommon Western cultural arrogance, treated this as nonsense and derided the historicity of King Gundaphorus until modern archaeology established him as an important figure in North India in the second half of the first century. Coins of his reign have been found in Afghanistan, the Punjab, and the Indus Valley. Remains of some of his buildings, influenced by Greek architecture, indicate that he was a great builder. Interestingly enough, according to the legend, Thomas was a carpenter and was asked by the king to build him a palace.



Piecing together the various traditions, it seems that Thomas left northwest India when invasion threatened, and travelled by ship to the Malabar Coast in the southwest of the country. He reputedly preached to all classes of people and had about seventeen thousand converts, including members of the four principal castes. Later, stone crosses were erected at the places where churches were founded, and they became pilgrimage centres. In accordance with apostolic custom, Thomas ordained teachers and leaders or elders, who were reported to be the earliest ministers of the Malabar church.

According to tradition, he then crossed to the Coromandel Coast of south-east India, and attained martyrdom by being speared by four soldiers at Saint Thomas Mount in Chennai, perhaps in 72 AD, and was buried on the site of San Thomé cathedral in Mylapore in Tamil Nadu state.

### *On the good use of money*

When Thomas was travelling on his evangelizing journeys, he was called one day before a king (Gundaphorus), who asked him his trade. Thomas said he was a carpenter and builder, and could build the king a palace if he wanted one.

The king said he did, and Thomas promised to build him one the next winter. The king was surprised, because most people built during the good months of summer. But Thomas insisted, so the king gave him a lot of money over a period of months. Thomas used the money to help the poor, especially in winter.

After a while the king sent a message, asking Thomas how the work was going. He replied that it was going well, and that nothing remained except to put on the roof. The king sent him gold and silver for it. Thomas thanked God for this great gift and spent it on the poor.

Then, one day, the king went to the city to see his new palace. He asked about it, but no one knew anything. They said Thomas had been very generous with the poor and had helped many people in need, was healing the sick, and preaching about a new god. The king became furious and sent for Thomas.

When Thomas came, the king asked him, 'Have you built me my palace?' 'Yes,' said Thomas. And the king said, 'Then show it to me.' Thomas said, 'You can't see it now, but you will see it after you have died.' This

made the king even more angry and he threw Thomas into prison, saying he would have him flayed alive.

While all this was going on, a brother of the king, named Gad, became seriously ill and died. A lavish funeral was prepared. But as Gad was being dressed in his burial garments he came back to life. The king was delighted and ran to his side.

Gad said to the king, 'I know you have a generous heart and that you will give me anything I ask.' The king said, 'Ask for whatever you want and I will give it.' Gad said, 'Sell me your palace in heaven.' The king was puzzled and asked him, 'How could I have a palace in heaven?'

Gad told him that when he died he was carried to heaven by angels who showed him many beautiful palaces. After a while they came to one that was especially beautiful, and he begged them, saying, 'Let me have even the smallest room in that beautiful palace.' But the angels said they couldn't do that; it had been built by Thomas and belonged to his brother, the king. So Gad asked the angels to let him return to earth so that he could buy it from his brother. The angels agreed.

The king said to Gad, 'I can't sell it to you, but if you want to buy one just like it, I will show you how you can do it.' Gad was delighted. The king set Thomas free, and Gad gave him money to build another palace like the first. Thomas used that money in the same way, helping the poor. King Gundaphorus and Gad became Christians.

## **SAINT ELIZABETH OF PORTUGAL: 4 July**

Elizabeth, or Isabel in Portuguese, was born in Aragon, Spain, the daughter of King Peter III of Aragon, on 17 November 1271, and named after her great-aunt, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. She was married to King Denis (Diniz) of Portugal in 1288, when she was seventeen and he twenty-seven. The marriage had been arranged for dynastic purposes, and neither of the couple was consulted. Nor had they met, even on their wedding day, as the ceremony was conducted by proxy. She came from, and she entered into, families where men changed their women like they changed their horses – the hormones were doing the thinking. Excommunications to try to stop this flew fast, furious – and futile.

Queen Elizabeth lived an intense religious life and was devoted to the poor and sick. This was a reproach to many around her and caused her ill-will in some quarters. A story is told of how her husband's jealousy was aroused by a courtier's slander of her, and how he condemned her supposedly guilty accomplice to a cruel death, but was convinced of Elizabeth's innocence by the accidental substitution of her accuser for the intended victim.

Elizabeth took an active interest in affairs of state and was a decisive conciliator during negotiations between her husband and the king of Castile which fixed the borders between Portugal and Spain by the Treaty of Alcanizes in 1297. Later, in 1304, Elizabeth and Denis

arbitrated successfully between the kings of Castile and Aragon.

She and her husband had two children, a daughter named Constance, and a son, Afonso. On 21 January 1298, at Guarda, Denis officially designated her as guardian of his many children born out of wedlock. As if that were not difficult enough, he also exiled her from his court.

Elizabeth mediated between her husband and her son during a civil war from 1322 to 1324. Afonso accused the king of favouring a son born out of wedlock, of whom he had many. The story goes that Elizabeth, during the battle of Alvalade in 1323, mounted on a mule, positioned herself between the opposing armies to prevent Denis from killing his son. Once the illegitimate son was exiled, Afonso swore loyalty to the king and peace was restored.

Two days after Denis' death, Elizabeth entered the Poor Clare monastery that she had founded near Coimbra, but without becoming a nun. She joined the Secular Franciscan Order, and devoted the rest of her life to the poor. During a great famine in 1293, she gave her own food to the starving, saying, 'I would rather die of hunger than deny aid to the poor... and so become guilty before God of their death.' She also paid the dowries of poor girls, she educated children, and was a benefactor of hospitals and schools, including what may be the world's first school for the study of agriculture. This

recalls to mind a saying of the Irish writer Jonathan Dean Swift (1677-1745): -

He gave it for his opinion that whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together. (*Gulliver's Travels*)

In 1336, she was called to act as a peacemaker once more when her son went to war against his son-in-law, the king of Castile. In spite of her age, Elizabeth went to the battle-field. She again stopped the fighting and arranged terms of peace. But the exertion brought on her final illness, and she died on 4 July 1336, aged sixty-five. Miracles were said to have followed upon her death, as they had in life, and she was canonized in 1625.

(See the Note on the Just Ruler)

## **SAINT ANTHONY MARIA ZACCARIA: 5 July**

Anthony was born in Italy in 1502 to noble parents. When he was two, his father died, and Anthony was brought up as an only child by his mother. At an early age, he took a vow of chastity. He studied philosophy and medicine at university, and then practised as a doctor for three years.

At the age of twenty-five, he began studying for the priesthood. Because of his Christian upbringing and already extensive studies, he was ordained in just three years. He worked mainly in hospitals and institutions for the poor. In Milan, he laid the foundations of three religious orders: one for men (the Clerics Regular of Saint Paul, commonly known as Barnabites); one for un-cloistered nuns, the Angelic Sisters of Saint Paul; and a congregation for married people, the Laity of Saint Paul, originally called the Married of Saint Paul, and sometimes referred to in North America as the Oblates of Saint Paul. The three foundations met regularly and engaged together in various forms of apostolic action. Their aim was the reform of the society of their day, beginning with clergy and religious.

The Barnabites' main focus was the teachings of Saint Paul and love for the Eucharist and Christ crucified. Since the order criticized abuses in the church, Zaccaria made enemies. He was twice investigated by the Inquisition for heresy, but was acquitted each time. He said: -

We should love and feel compassion for those who oppose us, rather than abhor and despise them, since they harm themselves and do us good, and adorn us with crowns of everlasting glory while they incite God's anger against themselves.

In 1536, he stepped down as head of the order and went to Vicenza, where he reformed two convents and founded the order's second house.

He popularized the solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for the adoration of the faithful accompanied by preaching. He also revived the custom of ringing church bells at 3 p.m. on Fridays, in remembrance of the crucifixion of Jesus. He left only a few writings: twelve letters, six sermons, and the Constitutions of the Barnabites.

While on a mission, he caught a fever and died on 5 July 1539, at the age of only thirty-seven. Pope Leo XIII canonized him on 27 May 1897.



## **SAINT MARIA GORETTI: 6 July**

Maria Goretti was born in Italy on 16 October 1890. She was the third of six children, with two sisters and three brothers. By the time she was six, her family had become so poor that they were forced to give up their farm, to move, and to work for other farmers. Maria's father, Luigi, died of malaria when she was nine. While her mother, brothers, and sister worked in the fields, Maria would cook, sew, watch her baby sister, Teresa, and look after the home. It was a hard life, but the family was close, sharing a strong faith. Later on, they moved to a house they shared with another family, the Serenellis, including the latter's nineteen year old son, Alessandro.

On 5 July 1902, Alessandro Serenelli, finding eleven-year-old Maria alone, came in, and, not for the first time, demanded that she have sex with him. She had been afraid to speak of his demands because he had threatened to kill her. He made clear his intention of forcing her if she did not comply, and once more threatened to kill her. She would not submit, however, protesting that what he wanted to do was a mortal sin and warning him that he would go to hell. She fought to stop him, screaming, 'No! It is a sin! God does not want it!' Serenelli first started choking her, but when she insisted she would die rather than submit to him, he stabbed her eleven times with an awl. She tried to reach the door, but he stopped her, stabbing her three more times before running away.

Maria's baby sister woke and started screaming. When Alessandro's father and Maria's mother came to check, they found Maria and took her to hospital. The doctors were surprised that she was still alive. She underwent surgery but her injuries were beyond medical help. Halfway through it, Maria woke up. The pharmacist said to her, 'Maria, think of me in paradise.' She looked at him and said, 'Who knows which of us is going to be there first?' He replied, 'You, Maria.' And she said 'Then I will gladly think of you.' Of her killer, she said, 'May God forgive him! I want him in heaven.' The following day, 6 July, twenty hours after the attack, Maria died of her injuries, while looking at a picture of Our Lady, and holding a cross.

Serenelli was captured shortly after Maria's death. Originally, he was going to be sentenced to life imprisonment, but since he was a minor at the time, it was commuted to thirty years. In jail, he remained uncommunicative and unrepentant for three years until the local bishop visited him. Later, he wrote to the bishop, asking for prayers and telling him about a dream he had had of Maria. Many years later, after his release, Serenelli visited Maria's still-living mother, and asked her forgiveness. She forgave him, saying that if Maria had forgiven him then she could not do less. They went to Mass together the next day, making Communion side by side. Alessandro reportedly prayed every day to Maria. He attended her canonization in 1950. He later lived and worked in a Capuchin friary as its gardener until his death in 1970.

Maria's mother, Assunta, attended the canonization, perhaps the only time that a mother attended the canonization of a child of hers. Maria was buried in a church in Nettuno, south of Rome. It was reported that her body is incorrupt, but this is not the case. It is kept inside a statue which is beneath the altar, which has mistakenly been believed by some to be her body.

## **THE MARTYRS OF CHINA: 9 July**

Eighty-seven Chinese Catholics and thirty-three Western missionaries were martyred between the mid-17th century and 1930 because of their ministry or their refusal to apostatize from the faith.

On January 15, 1648, the Manchu Tartars, having invaded the region of Fujian and shown themselves hostile to Christianity, imprisoned, tortured and beheaded Francisco Fernández de Capillas, a Dominican priest, aged forty. He is recognized as the first Christian martyr of China. (There were Nestorian Christians in China in the sixth century, but little is known of them.)

After the first wave of missionary activity, the Qing government banned the Christian religion in 1724, linking it to “perverse sects and sinister doctrines” in Chinese folk religion. (An added complexity was that China had, for centuries, wavered for and against openness towards the outside world. For example, Admiral Zheng He, who died in 1433, travelled to the Middle East and East Africa from where he brought back a giraffe and left pottery, possibly to Europe, the Pacific Islands and maybe North America. Then, in 1424-5, the Hongxi emperor banned long-distance voyages, burned naval architects’ drawings, the shipyards themselves and executed shipwrights. China closed in on itself.)

However, despite the ban of 1724, the Catholic faith continued to exist and increased many-fold in areas

outside government control. Many Chinese Christians fled to other parts of China or to Indonesia, where Christian books were translated. Many missionaries entered the country in secret. Some evaded patrols on the rivers and coasts, but some were caught and executed.

Five Spanish Dominican missionaries, who worked between 1715 and 1747, were executed in a persecution that started in 1729 and broke out again in 1746. While Catholicism had been authorised by some emperors in the preceding centuries, Emperor Kia-Kin (1796–1821) published severe decrees against it. These were directed mainly against Chinese studying for the priesthood and missionary priests.

Included among them are the following: -

Augustine Zhao Rong, a Chinese diocesan priest. Having first been one of the soldiers who had escorted Bishop Dufresse from Chengdu to Beijing, he was moved by his patience and asked to be accepted as a catechumen. Once baptized, he went to the seminary and was ordained a priest. He was arrested and tortured, and died in 1815.

Peter Wu, a Chinese lay catechist. After his baptism in 1796, he spent his life proclaiming the Christian faith. All attempts to make him apostatize were in vain. He was strangled on 7 November 1814.

Joseph Zhang Dapeng, a merchant and lay catechist. Baptised in 1800, he became the heart of the mission in the city of Kony-Yang. He was imprisoned, and then strangled on 12 March 1815.

Gabriel-Taurin Dufresse, a bishop. He was arrested on 18 May 1815, taken to Chengdu, condemned and executed on 14 September 1815.

Agnes Cao Guiying, a widow, born into an old Christian family. She instructed girls who had recently been converted to the faith. She was executed on 1 March 1856.

Peter Liu, a Chinese lay catechist. He was arrested in 1814 and condemned to exile in Tartary, where he remained for almost twenty years. Returning home, he was again arrested and then strangled on 17 May 1834.

Agatha Lin Zao was called on to renounce the Christian religion. Refusing to do so, she was beheaded.

In June 1840, the Chinese Imperial Commissioner of Guangdong, wishing to abolish the opium trade that was conducted by the British, had more than twenty thousand chests of opium thrown into the sea. This was made a pretext for war, which was won by the British. China was forced to sign its first international treaty of modern times, followed by others with America and France. France replaced Portugal as the power protecting the missions. Soon after, a twofold decree was issued: one permitting Chinese to follow the Catholic religion; the other abolishing penalties against Catholics, and restoring confiscated property. A treaty signed in 1846 also allowed missionaries to enter China, but only to the treaty ports open to Europeans.

In the mid-nineteenth century, there was a civil war in China known as the Taiping rebellion. A Chinese Christian named Hong Xiuqian claimed to be the

younger brother of Jesus Christ and to have received a mission from God to fight evil and usher in a period of peace. His followers took control of large parts of the country. They destroyed Buddhist and Taoist shrines, and temples to local divinities, and opposed Chinese folk religion. The war, which ended in July 1864, killed between twenty and thirty million people, the largest loss of life in any conflict in human history other than the Second World War. Understandably, the war gave Christianity a bad name in the eyes of Emperor Xianfeng and the Chinese people. Furthermore, Christian activity had become associated with foreign imperialism. France, for instance, justified its intervention in China on the ground that it was protecting the missions.

Following the martyrdom of a French bishop in 1856, France launched a military expedition. This concluded in 1860 with the Treaty of Tientsin, which gave Catholic missionaries the freedom to move throughout China and to purchase land. From then on the church could live openly and carry out its missionary activity, including higher education in universities and scientific research. Thanks to the multiplication of cultural institutes, deeper links were established between the church and China, with its rich cultural traditions. This collaboration with the Chinese authorities led to mutual appreciation of values.

However, some missionaries provoked the Chinese by building churches or schools on top of old temples or near official buildings. They also sometimes acted as though they were quarantining Chinese converts from

the surrounding society; this was done because of the hostility of family and friends to conversion. But the separation fuelled suspicion among Chinese as to what the missionaries were doing.

Chinese literati and gentry produced pamphlets attacking Christian beliefs as socially subversive and irrational. Incendiary handbills and fliers distributed to crowds were linked to outbreaks of violence against Christians. Sometimes, no official incitement was needed to provoke people to attack Christians. For example, in south-eastern China, Christian missionaries frequently refused to take part in communal prayers for rain and to contribute funds for devotions to Chinese deities. In addition, Catholic missions offered protection to those who came to them, including criminals, fugitives from the law, and rebels against the government. This led to government hostility.

The next persecution came in the so-called Boxer uprising. Accumulated hatred against foreigners in the last decades of the nineteenth century because of the political and social changes following the Opium War and the imposition of the “Unequal Treaties” by Western powers, was a motivating factor in this. It began at the start of the twentieth century and caused the deaths of some thirty thousand Chinese Christians. However, the motive for the killing of missionaries was religious. Historical documents provide evidence of anti-Christian hatred spurring the “Boxers” to massacre missionaries and lay Christians. A document issued in 1900, said, in substance, that the time for good relations with European



missionaries and Christians was past: the former must be repatriated and the faithful forced to apostatize, on penalty of death.

Following the failure of the Boxer rebellion, the government recognized it had no choice but to modernize, and this led to many conversions in the following decades. The Chinese developed respect for the moral and professional standards of Christian hospitals and schools.

The continuing association between Western imperialism and missionary work nevertheless continued to fuel hostility towards Christianity. Since the coming to power of the communists in 1949, it is lay men and women who have kept the church alive in many places. All missionaries were banned by the communist government after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. The fact that the Catholic church is led from outside China, that its bishops are appointed from outside, and Rome's continuing recognition of Taiwan – which Beijing calls “the renegade province” - as the legitimate government of China remain large problems. However, an offer in recent years by Rome to recognize Beijing as the sole government of China has made no difference. In 1949, Catholics outnumbered Protestants three to one. Now it is the other way round: the Protestant practice of lay leadership flourished in the absence of clergy.

## A Note on the Chinese Rites

Matteo Ricci and other Jesuits were the first Christian missionaries in China, with the exception of Nestorian Christians in the sixth century. Recognizing that Chinese culture was well developed and that many Chinese were well educated, they sought to find ways of accommodating local customs, provided these were not in opposition to the Christian faith. They won approval from Rome in doing so. An instruction given to the Paris Foreign Mission Society by the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in 1659 stated,

What would be more absurd than to bring France, Spain, Italy or any other European country to the Chinese? Do not bring to them our countries, but instead bring to them the faith, a faith that does not reject or hurt the rites nor the usages of any people, provided that these are not distasteful, but that instead keeps and protects them.

In the seventeenth century, other religious orders such as Dominicans, Franciscans, and Augustinians started missionary work in China, often coming from the Philippines. Unlike the Jesuits, they rejected adaptation to local customs and wished to apply in China the same *tabula rasa* principle they had applied in other places, and were horrified by the practices of the Jesuits. They ignited a heated controversy and brought it to Rome.

The Jesuits argued that Chinese folk religion and offerings to the emperor and departed ancestors were civil in nature and not incompatible with Christianity; their opponents argued that these were an expression of local religion and incompatible with the faith.

In 1715, Pope Clement XI made the assessment that the Confucian rituals were in conflict with Christian teaching. In 1742, Benedict XIV reiterated Clement XI's decree. He ordered missionaries in China to take an oath not to discuss the issue again.

The Kangxi emperor rejected Clement's decree and banned Christian missions. The *Decree of Kangxi* (1721) states,

Reading this [Clement's] proclamation, I have concluded that the Westerners are petty indeed. It is impossible to reason with them because they do not understand larger issues as we understand them in China. There is not a single Westerner versed in Chinese works, and their remarks are often incredible and ridiculous. To judge from this proclamation, their religion is no different from other small, bigoted sects of Buddhism or Taoism. I have never seen a document which contains so much nonsense. From now on, to avoid further trouble, Westerners should not be allowed to preach in China.

Very much later, Pope John XXIII said that the Jesuits were right and Rome was wrong.

It may be that there were different understandings of what religion was. Was it a philosophy of life based simply on reason, in which case one could legitimately pick and mix, or was it a faith based on revelation from God? And there were other issues, too: -

A Chinese official, Zhigang, was averse to Christianity, which he thought was a good doctrine, but hypocritical: Westerners preach “the love of God” and “the love of man”, and they seem really to believe it. And yet they wage war with gunboats and cannons to conquer people by force, as well as imposing opium, a poison worse than plague, on the Chinese – all for profit. (Jung Chang, *Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine who launched Modern China*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2013, pp.80-81)

(See also the Note on some Martyrdom.)

## **SAINT BENEDICT of NORCIA: 11 July**

The only ancient account of Benedict's life is in Pope Gregory I's *Dialogues*, written about 593. Gregory drew on the testimony of those who lived with Benedict and saw his miracles. His account paints a picture of a gentle, disciplined man.

Benedict was born about 480, the son of a Roman noble of Norcia, in Umbria, Italy; he had a twin sister, Scholastica. In Rome, he began the course of study of the son of a wealthy family, but was disappointed by the dissolute and licentious lives of his companions. He was also deeply affected by the love of a woman. He left Rome, seemingly just to get away from its hedonistic lifestyle. He lived first near Subiaco, about 65 km east of Rome, in some kind of association with men who were in sympathy with his view of life. A monk, Romanus of Subiaco, talked with him about his aim in life, and gave him a monk's habit. On his advice, Benedict became a hermit, and, for three years, lived alone in a cave where Romanus visited him and brought him food.

During those years of solitude, broken only by occasional communications with the outside world and by visits from Romanus, Benedict matured in mind and character, in knowledge of himself and of others. At the same time he became known to, and respected by, those about him, so much so that on the death of the abbot of a monastery in the neighbourhood, the community asked him to become its abbot. Benedict knew that the monks'

ways were very different from his, and that they could never agree; yet, in the end, he gave his consent. The experiment failed: the monks tried to poison him.

Benedict returned to his cave at Subiaco. From this time his miracles seemed to become frequent, and many people, attracted by his holiness, came to live under his guidance. He founded twelve communities nearby, and eventually a monastery at Monte Cassino, on a hilltop between Rome and Naples. There is no evidence that he intended founding an order. The order named after him is of later origin, and is not an "Order" as commonly understood, but a confederation of autonomous congregations. Nor did he become a priest. His predominantly lay communities were clericalized through the influence of clerical communities set up by Saint Augustine. Benedict died while in prayer in Monte Cassino on 21 March 547; in 1964, he was named patron of Europe by Pope Paul VI.

His only extant writing is his *Rule*. It comprises seventy-three short chapters. Its teaching is of two kinds: spiritual - how to live a Christ-centred life; and administrative - how to run a monastery. More than half the chapters describe how to be obedient and humble, and what to do when a member of the community is not. About a quarter regulate the life of prayer, and one-tenth deal with the management of the monastery. Two chapters describe the abbot's pastoral duties. The *Rule* is heavily influenced by the writings of John Cassian. It has a unique spirit of balance, moderation and reasonableness (*epikeia*), and this persuaded most

religious communities founded throughout the Middle Ages to adopt it. As a result, the *Rule of Saint Benedict* became the most influential religious rule in Western Christendom, and Benedict is often called the father of Western Christian monasticism.

Here are some extracts from the *Rule*, by chapter: -

‘Now the reason why we have said that all should be called to council is that God often reveals what is better to the younger.’ 3

‘In community, however, let prayer be very short...’ 20

‘When they rise for the Work of God, let them [the monks] gently encourage one another, on account of the excuses to which the sleepy are addicted.’ 22

Benedict allowed a monk to leave monastic life and return again three times, before saying. ‘No more.’ 29

‘Let all things be done in moderation on account of the faint-hearted.’ 48

About the abbot: ‘Let him so temper all things that the strong may still have something to long after, and the weak may not draw back in alarm.’ 64

‘Let them [the monks] prefer nothing to Christ.’ 72

He speaks of ‘this little Rule for beginners.’ 73

Pope Benedict XVI, who chose his own name in honour of Benedict, said, ‘With his life and work Saint Benedict exercised a fundamental influence on the development of European civilization and culture.’ (9 April 2008) He helped Europe emerge from the dark night of history that followed the fall of the Roman empire. Over the centuries, his followers spread across

the continent to establish a new cultural unity based on Christian faith. They kept learning alive when it had collapsed in the towns, and they pioneered new techniques in building, agriculture, and fish-farming.



## **SAINT HENRY II: 13 July**

Henry was born on 6 May 972 in Bavaria to a family of local nobility. The German emperor, Otto III, arranged for him to receive a church education, seemingly hoping he might become a priest and thereby be excluded from imperial government. However, Henry became Duke of Bavaria in 995. Shortly after, he married Kunigunde of Luxembourg; they took vows of chastity and remained childless all their lives.

Otto died in 1002. Henry usurped the throne by bypassing the established electoral process and appealing directly to the people, and by using military force. He was crowned King of Germany in the same year. Then, following a military campaign in northern Italy, he was crowned King of Italy in Pavia on 14 May 1004. The following night, the people of the city revolted against him; in response, he had them massacred. He led three expeditions into Italy, suppressing local revolts to ensure his dominance over the peninsula.

Pope Benedict VIII persuaded him to launch a war against Byzantium for dominance of southern Italy. It had Muslim allies, while Henry, in addition to his own army, had two others, each led by an archbishop. The campaign was inconclusive.

But Henry's main focus was on relations with the east, especially Poland. He reversed Otto's peaceful policies, ending the excellent relations that had existed with

Poland. Returning from Italy as king, and with the support of a pagan Slavic people, he attacked Poland in 1004. This brought an end to efforts to Christianize the Slavs and the Prussians. Interspersed by peace treaties, Henry launched three wars against Poland, lasting fourteen years in all. In one campaign, his army killed several thousand Polish prisoners, including women and children. A lasting peace treaty was finally signed in 1018.

In 1012, Benedict VIII was elected pope, but was forced by a rival claimant, Gregory VI, to leave Rome. He fled to Germany and appealed to Henry for protection. Henry agreed to restore him in return for coronation as emperor. Henry arrived in Rome in 1014, restored Benedict as pope, and was crowned emperor on 14 February 1014. Then, under his presidency and that of the pope, a synod appointed bishops, issued decrees against simony and for clerical celibacy, and ordered the restitution of church property. Henry persuaded Benedict to include the *Filioque* in the Nicene Creed; this clause states that the Holy Spirit emanates from both God the Father *and from the Son*. It was, and still is, a bone of contention between the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Along with the issue of papal primacy, this was among the principal causes of schism between the Western and Eastern churches in 1054.

Henry's policy towards the nobles was focused on increasing imperial control. He relied on his connection with the church to justify his power and higher status over the dukes. Unlike his predecessors, he showed no

clemency to nobles who rebelled against him. This resulted in more conflict, forcing him to turn to the clergy for help; it was only through their support that he survived the numerous revolts against him by nobles during the first decade of his reign.

His predecessors had long used the church as an integral part of imperial government. Henry claimed a divine right to rule the empire and presented himself as protector of Christendom. The *Imperial-Church System* reached its climax under him. He consolidated power by cultivating personal and political ties with the church, using the clergy as a counter-weight to the nobility. Through donations to the church and the establishment of new dioceses, he strengthened his rule across the empire and increased his control over the church. He appointed bishops, and enforced clerical celibacy so that lands and offices he granted church officials would not be passed on to their heirs. He supported bishops as secular rulers for the same reason, and the succession would be in his gift. While a diocese was vacant, its revenue went to the imperial treasury, and he didn't mind that either! He reserved to himself the appointment and investiture of bishops of imperially-owned churches. For most of his campaigns against Poland and Byzantium, the armies of the prince-bishops constituted the largest contingents. By this means, Henry controlled the empire and the church, but brought about a severe loss of the church's autonomy. His *Imperial-Church System* was copied by other rulers, such as the kings of France, who created the *Alliance du trône et l'autel*,

(alliance of throne and altar), or cross and crown, as it was called elsewhere.

Against a backdrop of almost constant warfare, his reign of twenty-two years focused heavily on titles, territories and taxes. He died on 15 July 1024 at the age of fifty-two, after suffering from a chronic, painful urinary infection. This prevented his efforts to convoke a general council of the church to confirm the *Imperial-Church System* of government in Europe.

During his lifetime, Henry became an oblate of the Benedictine Order. In 1147, Pope Eugene III canonized him for his efforts on behalf of the church. His relics were carried on campaigns against heretics in the 1160's. His wife, Cunegunde, was canonized by Pope Innocent III in 1200.

(See the Note on the Just Ruler)

## **SAINT CAMILLUS de LELLIS: 14 July**

Camillus de Lellis was born near Naples in 1550. He had several siblings, all of whom died young. His mother, too, died when he was only thirteen, while his father, a mercenary, was nearly always away from home. Among his father's exploits was participating in the sack of Rome by the German emperor in 1527. Camillus went to live with an uncle and aunt but did not stay with them. When the father was at home, he introduced Camillus to gambling, and both became addicted. Camillus grew up wild and undisciplined, and, at seventeen, joined his father in a war against the Turks. He was short-tempered, violent and aggressive. He was several times dismissed from military service and - later on - from civilian employment because of fighting, usually associated with quarrels over gambling. After seven years of military life as a mercenary, his regiment was disbanded.

Surprisingly - perhaps through his mother's influence - during these years he maintained respect for prayer and receiving the sacraments, although he did neither. On several occasions he made serious efforts to reform his life, but none lasted for long. But he may have been influenced by witnessing his father's death which was preceded by a seemingly sincere conversion.

He began working in a Capuchin friary, though constantly troubled by a leg wound which would not heal. Despite his continued aggressiveness and

gambling, the guardian of the friary saw a better side to him, and tried to bring it out. Eventually, Camillus took the message to heart, and, in 1575, he had a conversion experience. He entered a Capuchin friary as a postulant but, since his wound was declared incurable, he was asked to leave.

He moved to Rome where he lived an ascetic life, performing many penances. He had as spiritual director and confessor a local priest, Philip Neri, who was himself to found a religious congregation and be declared a saint. (See 26 May)

Camillus entered the hospital of Saint James in Rome for treatment of his leg wound. To his dismay, he found that the place was a hospital only in name. The staff treated patients with little respect; the hospital was dirty and the food inadequate. So he began there and then working to improve it; he later became its director. At times, when he was unable to stand or walk because of his wound, he crawled from bed to bed, offering what help he could. He went on to invite a group of pious men to show their faith through the care of its patients. Eventually, he felt he should establish a religious community and seek holy orders for that purpose. Neri, his confessor, gave his approval, and a donor gave him the money for his seminary studies. He was ordained in 1584 by the last surviving English Catholic bishop.

Camillus established an order known first as the Servants of the Sick, later as the Brothers of a Happy Death, and, much later still, the Camillans. He said of it,

‘I do not worry about the future of the Order. I trust God to raise up men to assist and defend it.’ Much of its work focused on caring in their homes for people who could not go to hospital. His efforts for the proper treatment of the sick focused on sanitation, good food, fresh air and the isolation of those with contagious diseases. He believed that spiritual help should go hand-in-hand with clinical, that caring and curing were inseparable, and told his brothers to nurse for love, not for money.

He and his team also looked after the dying, especially those with no one to care for them. This included Jews and Turks as well as Christians. He became aware of cases of people being buried alive, so he instructed the brothers to wait fifteen minutes past the moment of apparent death before sending them to the mortuary.

His experience in war led him to establish the first group of health workers who would accompany soldiers to battle and treat their wounds there. The large red cross on their habit remains a symbol of their Order today; it was the original Red Cross. During a battle at Canizza, Italy, in 1601, while Camillans were caring for the wounded, the tent where they stored their equipment and supplies was burned. Everything in it was destroyed except the red cross on a habit belonging to one of the brothers. They took this as a sign of God’s approval of the Red Cross of Saint Camillus. (The Red Cross of Henri Dunant’s ICRC, based on reversing the Swiss flag, did not come into existence until 1863.)

In his later years, the people of Rome credited Camillus and his brothers with ridding the city of a plague and subsequent famine.

In 1591, Pope Gregory XV recognized the group as an Order. They took a fourth vow, 'to serve the sick, even with danger to one's own life.' The order expanded throughout Italy and into Hungary.

In his early years Camillus had been weak-willed and stubborn; in his later years he became strong-willed and flexible. All his life, his ulcerated leg caused him suffering, but he would allow no one to make a fuss over him. When he knew he was dying he said,

The approach of death is indeed the best news I could hear. A person must once pay the forfeit of death, and I do not value this life as being worth a farthing if only Our Lord would give me a small corner in paradise.

He died in Rome on 14 July 1614. He is a patron saint of the sick, hospitals, nurses and doctors; people also ask his help against gambling.



## **SAINT FRANCIS SOLANO: 14 July**

Francisco Sánchez-Solano Jiménez was born on 10 March 1549 near Córdoba in Spain. He was educated by the Jesuits, but felt drawn to the life of the Franciscans, whom he joined at the age of twenty. The community followed a strict regime of prayer, silence and fasting. Francis followed this rigorously, going barefoot and abstaining from meat. As a result, his health was permanently damaged, leaving him unwell and fatigued.

After ordination in Seville in 1576, Francis was appointed preacher to the surrounding villages. He asked to be allowed to preach in North Africa, in the hope of achieving martyrdom, but was refused, so he turned his attention to the American missions.

After his father's death, Francis returned home to care for his mother. During that time, he gained the reputation of a wonderworker, and a number of people were cured through his intercession. In 1581, he was appointed master of novices, in which capacity he served for two years, inspiring the novices by visiting the sick. About that time, there was an outbreak of plague in the city of Montoro. With another friar, Francis spent some weeks caring for the victims, who had been sent out of the city. Both friars contracted the disease, but Francis survived it. There is still a street in the city honouring him for his work at that time.

Then King Philip II asked the Franciscans to send missionaries to preach the Gospel in the Americas. Francis wanted to serve there, and was granted his request. He left Spain for Peru in 1589 at the age of forty.

For twenty years, he worked at spreading the Gospel in Argentina and Paraguay. He was skilled in languages, and acquired some of the local languages quickly. Being a musician also, Francis played the violin for the people, which helped them relate to him. He is often depicted playing one.

After that came an appointment as guardian in Lima, and, later, in Argentina and Paraguay. It is said that, in 1610, he predicted the 1618 earthquake that devastated Trujillo, Peru. He is also said to have foretold his own death, which occurred in Lima on 14 July 1610. He was canonized by Pope Benedict XIII in 1726.

## **SAINT KATERI TEKAKWITHA: 14 July**

Kateri Tekakwitha was born in a Mohawk village in northern New York about 1656. (Her name is derived from Catherine.) She was the daughter of a Mohawk chief and a Catholic Algonquin mother. Her mother was educated and baptized by French missionaries. The village Kateri was born into was very diverse because of the constant influx of captives. She was captured in war against the Iroquois and taken to the Mohawk homeland. When she was five, a smallpox epidemic killed her family and destroyed her health. She was adopted by an uncle who discouraged her religious faith.

She engaged in traditional women's work, growing and preparing food, and making clothing, belts, mats, baskets and boxes. About the age of thirteen she was pressured to marry but she refused and ran away. The Jesuit record of Kateri states that she was shy and avoided social contact, wearing a blanket over her head, because smallpox had destroyed her skin.

The atmosphere Kateri grew up in was one of constant change, due to interaction with European colonists. When she was ten, the French attacked the Mohawk, burning their villages and food supply. Though a peace treaty was agreed, a condition was that the Mohawk accept missionaries. A mission was located where Kateri lived, near Montreal, but her uncle opposed contact with missionaries, not wanting her to convert. Kateri first met a missionary when she was eleven. She began attending

catechism class, and learned so well that baptism was suggested. This is significant because, according to the then missionary policy, baptism was withheld from new converts until they were on their deathbed, or until the missionaries could be certain they would not relapse. It seems that Kateri was very devout and fully committed. She was baptized on Easter Sunday, 18 April 1676.

After this, Kateri remained in the village for only another six months because she was continually harassed and accused of crimes such as sorcery and sexual promiscuity. She went to the mission where she lived for the last two years of her life. She feared that she would not be saved, and practised severe physical penance as the way to holiness; for example, she would sleep on a mat made of thorns. Piercing the body to draw blood was a traditional practice of the Huron, Iroquois, and Mohawk, but the missionaries also urged such penances. Kateri believed that offering her blood through penance was a way to imitate Christ's crucifixion. She would flog herself with a whip as often as one thousand to twelve hundred blows in a session, but the Jesuits discouraged such severity. When local women learned of the existence of convents, they wanted to form their own, and, although this was discouraged by the missionaries, Kateri decided to devote her life to Christ.

People pressured Kateri to marry. She sought the advice of Father Pierre Cholenec who asked her what she truly wanted. According to his writings, her answer was, 'I have deliberated enough. For a long time my decision on what I will do has been made. I have

consecrated myself entirely to Jesus, son of Mary. I have chosen him for husband and he alone will take me for wife.' In 1679, on the Feast of the Annunciation, she became the "first virgin."

Around Holy Week 1680, there were indications of Kateri's weak physical state. She received the last sacraments, and said to her friends, 'Take courage, despite those who have no faith.' She also said, 'Be assured that you are pleasing in the sight of God, and that I will help you when I am with him,' and 'Never give up penance.' Her last words were, 'I will love you in heaven.' She died on 17 April 1680 at the age of 24.

After her death, people noticed a change in her appearance. Father Cholenec wrote, 'This face, so marked and dark, suddenly changed about a quarter of an hour after her death, and became in a moment so beautiful and so white that I observed it immediately.' She is said to have appeared to people after her death. Fifty years later, a convent of Native American nuns opened in Mexico. Kateri became known as the Lily of the Mohawks, or the Mohawk Maiden, and, in 2012, became the first Native American woman to be canonized.

## SAINT BONAVENTURE: 15 July

Bonaventure was born John Fidenza near Viterbo, Italy, in 1221. Little is known of his childhood. He entered the Franciscan Order in 1243, and studied at the University of Paris. He became Master of Theology in 1257 in the company of Thomas Aquinas. Not long after, he was elected General Minister of the order. In 1265, he was appointed Archbishop of York, but was never consecrated and resigned the appointment a year later. It was by his order that another Franciscan, Roger Bacon, was prohibited from lecturing at Oxford, and ordered to put himself under the surveillance of the Order at Paris. But he worked to restore unity in an Order divided between radicals (the “Spirituals”) and conservatives. He wrote a book, *The Poverty of Christ*, in defence of the mendicant orders. In his role as General Minister, he had such influence that he was sometimes called the second founder of the Franciscans.

Bonaventure was instrumental in procuring the election of Pope Gregory X, who rewarded him with the title of cardinal bishop of Albano, and called him to the Council of Lyons in 1274. There, on 15 July, after his intervention led to a union of the Greek and Latin churches, Bonaventure died suddenly at the age of fifty-three. A modern writer states,

This was a century when the lines between sanctity, power and violence can be difficult to discern, and, curiously, the diary of Bonaventure’s secretary was

discovered and published only a century ago. In it we learn that the theologian fell victim to a fate not uncommon in those days: murder. He was poisoned, to be exact, most likely by one of his own spiritual brethren. (Jon M. Sweeney, *The Pope who Quit: a True Medieval Tale of Mystery, Death and Salvation*, Image Books, New York, 2012, pp.27-28)

Bonaventure was canonized in 1482 by a Franciscan Pope, Sixtus IV, and ranked by another Franciscan Pope, Sixtus V, in 1588, along with Saint Thomas Aquinas as the greatest of the doctors of the church, with the title of Seraphic Doctor.

His writings include a four-volume *Commentary on the Sentences [Thoughts] of Peter Lombard*, and eight other works, among which are a *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, and a number of smaller works: *The Journey of the Soul to God*, *The Soliloquy*, *The Seven Stages of Eternity*, *The Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, *Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity* and *The Breviloquium (A Short Word)*, as well as two *Lives of Saint Francis of Assisi*. The authorship of some of these is disputed. Controversially, when Bonaventure wrote his *Lives of Saint Francis*, while General Minister, he ordered the destruction of all previous biographies of the saint. Fortunately, this order was not fully carried out and they survive to this day.

In philosophy, Bonaventure presents a mystical and Platonizing mode of speculation. To him, the purely intellectual element, though never absent, is of lesser

interest than the affections or the heart. He wrote, 'If you wish to know how such things [e.g., union with God] come about, consult grace, not doctrine; desire, not understanding; prayerful groaning, not studious reading; the Spouse, not the teacher; God, not man; and darkness, not clarity.' Saint Augustine was a hugely important influence on him; another was the mystic known as Dionysius the Areopagite.

Like all the scholastic doctors, Bonaventure examined the relation between reason and faith, but moves on to higher things. He wrote, 'A full explanation of the ten Commandments became necessary in the state of sin because the light of reason was obscured and the will had gone astray.' (*On the Sentences*, IV. 37.1.3 ) For him, the supreme end of life is union with God in contemplation and intense love. To achieve this, the soul must employ the proper means, which are prayer, the exercise of the virtues whereby it is enabled to accept the divine light, and meditation which may lead to ecstatic union with God. But union cannot be entirely reached in this life, and remains as a hope for the future.

In contemplating God, the mind has three distinct stages: - the senses, giving information of what is without and discerning the traces of the divine in the world; the reason, which gives knowledge of the soul as the image of the divine Being; and pure intellect, which gives wisdom about the Ultimate.

Bonaventure agreed with Saint Albert the Great regarding theology as a practical science. But he was not



merely a meditative thinker, whose works may form manuals of devotion; he was also a dogmatic theologian of the highest rank. But his theology is mystical more than dogmatic, affective more than rational. He delighted in paradoxes, for example, calling the cross of Christ a *concordantia oppositorum*.

Here are some extracts from his writings: -

‘Every creature is a divine word because it proclaims God.’

God created all things ‘not to increase his glory but to show it forth and communicate it.’ (*On the Sentences*, I, 2.2.1)

‘Only the male was made in the image of God.’ (*On the Sentences*, IV, distinction 25, article 2, question 1)

‘Let no one expect to find sufficiency in reading which lacks warmth, enquiry which lacks devotion, search which arouses no wonder, survey without enthusiasm, effort without piety, knowledge without love, intelligence without humility, application without grace, contemplation without wisdom inspired by God.’ (*The Journey of the Soul to God*, Prologue, n.4)

‘In your words and your works, look on Jesus as your model, whether you are speaking or silent, whether you are alone or with others.’

‘In this perfect love... where none shall love another less than he love himself, every one shall rejoice in every other as much as he rejoices in himself. And if the heart of man shall hardly contain his own joy over such great good, how shall it hold delights so many and so great?’  
(*Breviloquium*, 7.7.8)

‘However, there is only one way to achieve this, [Christian contemplation] - burning love of Christ crucified.’ (*Itinerarium*, prologue 1-3)

‘Lord Jesus Christ, pierce my soul with your love so that I may always long for you alone who are the bread of angels and the fulfilment of the soul's deepest desires. May my heart always hunger and feed upon you, so that my soul may be filled with your presence. May my soul thirst for you who are the source of life, wisdom, knowledge, light and all the riches of God our Father. May I always seek you and find you, think on you, speak to you and do all things for the honour and glory of your holy name. Be always my hope, my peace, my refuge and my help in whom my heart is founded, so that I may never be separated from you. Amen.’

## **OUR LADY of MOUNT CARMEL: 16 July**

Our Lady of Mount Carmel is the title given to the Blessed Virgin Mary in her role as patroness of the Carmelite Order. The first Carmelites were hermits living on Mount Carmel, which is not far from Nazareth in the Holy Land, from about 1191 onwards. They went there during the period of the Crusades from the late twelfth to the mid-thirteenth centuries. They built a chapel in the middle of their hermitages which they dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, whom they thought of as "the Lady of the place." The Stella Maris monastery on Mount Carmel, named after a traditional title of Mary, is considered the spiritual headquarters of the order. The Carmelites have given the church some of its greatest writers on Christian spirituality, saints such as Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross and Thérèse of Lisieux.

Why Mount Carmel, rather than any other? There is an association between the prophet Elijah and Mount Carmel. In 1 Kings 18.42, Elijah goes to the top of Carmel where he is told, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire the sound of sheer silence. (See 1 Kings 19.11-12)

Being receptive to God in silence became part of the Carmelite tradition of prayer. Saint John of the Cross wrote, 'All natural ability is insufficient to produce the supernatural goods that God alone infuses in the soul passively, secretly, and in silence.' (*The Dark Night of the Soul*, 2.15.1)

Carmelites see in Mary a model of the life of prayer and contemplation to which they aspire, a model of virtue, as well as the person who was closest to Jesus Christ. She is seen as one who points Christians to Christ, saying to all what she said to the servants at the wedding at Cana, 'Do whatever he [Jesus] tells you.' (John 2.5) Devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel means a call to the interior life. Carmel is the symbol of the contemplative life, the life dedicated to the quest for God, orientated towards intimacy with God. And the one who has best realized this highest of ideals is Our Lady herself.

*A prayer to Our Lady of Mount Carmel*

'Most beautiful flower of Mount Carmel, fruitful vine, splendour of Heaven, Blessed Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin, assist me in my need. Star of the Sea, help me and show me you are my Mother. Holy Mary, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and earth, I ask you with all my heart to help me in my need (*make request*). Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you. Holy Mary, I place this prayer in your hands. Amen.'

## **SAINT APOLLINARIS of RAVENNA: 20 July**

Apollinaris is said to have been a native of Antioch in Syria, born perhaps in the early decades of the second century.

It is claimed that, in his adult years, he became the first bishop of Ravenna in Italy, appointed by Saint Peter. He held the office for twenty-six years. He preached the Christian faith and worked miracles, so that many pagans became Christian. But he and his congregation faced constant persecution under the Roman Emperors Vespasian, Nero and Septimius Severus. They faced nearly constant persecution, and he was arrested and tortured on several occasions.

Despite several times being exiled, he kept returning to Ravenna. Finally, sentenced to banishment, as he and his congregation were leaving the city, he was arrested as their leader, tortured again and then killed by the sword. This was towards the end of the second century.

Historians regard most of the information about his life and especially his martyrdom, as having scarcely any historical value. The descriptions of his martyrdom were probably written by Archbishop Maurus of Ravenna (642-671), who may have wanted to publicize the claimed apostolic origin of the see of Ravenna, and also to strengthen his political aspirations against the influence of both Rome and Constantinople.

## SAINT LAWRENCE of BRINDISI: 21 July

Cesare de Rossi was born at Brindisi in Italy on 21 July 1559. As a child he displayed extraordinary mental and spiritual gifts. There was a custom in Italy at the time of inviting a boy to give a sermon in church in remembrance of Jesus being found in the temple at the age of twelve. So Lawrence gave his first sermon at the age of six! We are told that it was given with such strength that people were moved to reform their lives.

Lawrence entered the Capuchin novitiate at Verona when he was sixteen. From the beginning he was recognized as a man of rare ability and spirituality. He studied for the priesthood at Padua and learned six languages, including Greek and Hebrew. He is quoted as saying that if every Bible in the world were lost he could dictate the full text in Greek and Hebrew! (That is not impossible; it is not uncommon for Muslims to learn the Quran by heart.) He attributed his intellectual gifts to Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, to whom he had a special devotion. His writings, mostly sermons, run to fifteen large volumes, the most important of which is an exposition of Catholic doctrine on Our Lady, the *Mariale*. His theology was that of a popular preacher.

After his ordination he was called on to preach. He described preaching as ‘an apostolic task, an angelic task, a Christian task and a divine task.’ (*Lenten Sermon* 2) He quickly became so well-known and liked that, when he went to a town, all work stopped. Farmers

would come in from the surrounding countryside to hear him. His preaching was learned but simple and alive with emotion. He said, 'An unknown good cannot possibly be loved, but a known good is loved in proportion to its goodness and to our knowledge of it. Now God is infinitely good; he is all goodness, just as the sun is all light and fire is all heat.' (*Opera Omnia*, 8.452)

Sometimes his preaching aroused violent opposition. In later years, he had such success in bringing Protestants to the Catholic faith that an attempt was made to kill him. A gang of criminals tried to throw him from a bridge, while on another occasion they attacked the friary where he was staying and shot at the guardian.

He was called to Rome to work for the conversion of Jews living there. His knowledge of Hebrew and his gentle persuasion helped in this work and some Jews became Christian.

In his person he was a quiet man with great inner strength. He said little, had a ready smile, but was firm when the situation called for it. In later years, when he was sent to Germany with twelve other friars, including Blessed Benedict of Urbino, to work for the conversion of Lutherans to the Catholic Church, he had difficulties with the papal nuncio. Without reference to Lawrence, who was the friars' guardian, the nuncio had appointed friars to various offices. Lawrence reminded the nuncio that he, Lawrence, was in charge. He cancelled the nuncio's appointments and made his own.

His devotion to the Mass was outstanding. He sometimes became so absorbed in it that he forgot everything else. On one occasion it took him eighteen hours to say it! He remarked afterwards that he had never felt the time passing!

While he was preaching in Central Europe the Turkish army invaded. This Muslim army was greatly feared and Christian people believed they would have to resist it by force of arms if they were to keep their freedom, including their religious freedom. Lawrence roused the Christian leaders of Central Europe to unite, and he personally led an army into action. The turning point in the war came in a four-day battle in Hungary in which Lawrence led the Christian soldiers, holding up a crucifix in front of them and calling out encouragement. The Turkish army, although superior in numbers, was defeated and its threat to Europe ended.

Lawrence then returned to Italy where he hoped he might serve God in solitude. But a Chapter of the Order elected him General Minister and he accepted the office. During a visitation of the brothers in Germany he succeeded in reconciling the Holy Roman Emperor and his brother, Matthias. On returning to Italy, the people in the south of the country appealed to him for help. Their governor, appointed by King Philip II of Spain, was oppressing them cruelly. Lawrence agreed to travel to Spain to plead on their behalf. On arriving there he found that the king was in Portugal so he had to journey again. Meeting King Philip in Lisbon, he pleaded the people's case and the governor was replaced.



But all these labours, the endless travel under difficult conditions, and changing from one kind of work to another, had worn him down. He died in Lisbon on his sixtieth birthday, 22 July 1619.

Lawrence was canonized by Pope Leo XIII on 8 December 1881. In 1958, Pope John XXIII declared him Doctor of the Church with the title of *Doctor Evangelicus*.

## **SAINT MARY MAGDALENE: 22 July**

Mary Magdalene is distinguished from other women in the Gospel named Mary by adding Magdalene to her name. This may mean that she was from Magdala, a town thought to have been on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, or to be linked in some way to the Aramaic word *magdala*, meaning a tower.

Mary Magdalene is mentioned once in the Gospel before the crucifixion: -

The twelve were with him [Jesus], as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out... and many others, who provided for them out of their own resources. (Luke 8.1b-3; Mark 16.9)

Mary comes to the fore, uniquely among the disciples, at the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Mark 15.40, Matthew 27.56 and John 19.25 mention her as a witness to the crucifixion, along with other women. Luke does not name witnesses, but mentions 'women who had followed him from Galilee' standing at a distance. (23.49)

In listing witnesses who saw where Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea, Mark 15.47 and Matthew 27.61 both name only two people: Mary Magdalene and 'the other Mary,' who, in Mark, is 'the mother of James.'

Luke 23.55 describes the witnesses as the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee. John 19.39-42 mentions no other witness to the burial of Jesus except Nicodemus. John 20.1 names Mary Magdalene in describing who discovered the tomb to be empty. Mark 16.1 says she was accompanied by Salome and Mary the mother of James, while Matthew 28.1 omits Salome. Luke 24.10 says the group who reported to the disciples the finding of the empty tomb consisted of 'Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them.'

In Matthew, Mark and John, Mary Magdalene is the first witness to the resurrection. John 20.16 and Mark 16.9 both say simply that Jesus' first post-resurrection appearance was to Mary Magdalene alone. Mary's role as a witness is unusual because, at the time, women were not considered credible witnesses. In Matthew 28.9, Mary Magdalene is with the other women returning from the empty tomb when they all see the first appearance of Jesus. In Luke 24.1-7, the resurrection is announced to the women at the tomb by 'two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning' who suddenly appeared next to them.

The gospels of Mark and Luke record that the rest of the disciples did not believe Mary's report of what she had seen. Neither Mary Magdalene nor the other women are mentioned in Paul's list of appearances in 1 Corinthians 15.1. Instead, he writes that Jesus 'appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve.' After her disbelieved first report of a resurrection vision, Mary

disappears from the New Testament. She is not mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, and her fate remains undocumented. But from the tenth century onwards, she became known as 'the apostle to the apostles.' (The word *apostle* means 'someone sent.')

There has been a long-standing tradition that Mary Magdalene was a reformed prostitute. (Think of Magdalen homes, etc.) This may have had its origin in a homily on Luke 7.36-50, given by Pope Gregory the Great on 14 September 591. In it, he said: -

She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected, according to Mark. And what did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices? ... It is clear, brothers, that the woman previously used the ointment to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts.' (*Homily 33*)

But there is no basis in the Gospels for linking Mary of Magdala with the un-named woman of Luke 7.36-50 who anointed Jesus, nor with Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who anointed him in Bethany, nor that this latter Mary was a sinner. (John 12.1-3, 7) In Orthodox tradition, Mary Magdalene is often depicted on icons carrying a jar of ointment, because she brought ointment to anoint the body of Jesus in the tomb.

*Pace* Dan Brown and other writers of fiction, there is no historical evidence that Mary's relationship with Jesus was anything other than that of disciple and teacher.

## **SAINT BRIDGET OF SWEDEN: 23 July**

Birgitta, or Bridget, was born in Vadstena, on the shores of Lake Vattern in Sweden, in 1303, to wealthy aristocratic parents, Birger and Ingeborg Persson. At the age of fourteen, she married Ulf Gudmarsson, by whom she had eight children, four daughters and four sons, all of whom survived infancy, a rarity at the time. One of her daughters became a saint, Saint Catherine of Sweden.

Birgitta's saintly life soon became known far and wide. With her husband, she went on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella in Spain, from 1341 to 1343 following the *Camino*. A year after their return home, Ulf died at a Cistercian abbey.

After her husband's death, Birgitta became a member of the Secular Franciscan Order and devoted herself to a life of prayer and care for the poor and the sick. About 1346, she developed the idea of establishing a religious community which became known as the Order of the Most Holy Saviour, but after her death as the Brigittines. (She was succeeded as head of the Order by her daughter, Catherine. They are different from the Brigidines, named after Saint Brigid of Kildare, founded in Ireland in 1807 by Bishop Delaney.) One distinctive feature of the pre-Reformation houses of the Order was that they were double monasteries, both men and women forming a joint community, although with separate

cloisters. The male branch died out in 1842, but the female branch still has some houses.

About 1350, she went to Rome, accompanied by her daughter, Catherine, and a small group of priests and followers. This was done partly to obtain from the pope approval for the new Order and partly to promote her aim of elevating the moral tone of the age. This was during the period of the Great Western Schism, however, and she had to wait for the return of the papacy to Rome from Avignon, a move for which she worked for many years.

It was not until 1370 that Pope Urban V, during his attempt to re-establish the papacy in Rome, confirmed the Rule of the Order, but meanwhile Birgitta had made herself universally loved in Rome by her kindness and good works. Apart from occasional pilgrimages, including one to Jerusalem in 1373, she remained in Rome until her death on 23 July 1373. She was canonized in 1391 by Pope Boniface IX.

Birgitta believed herself to have had visions of the nativity and the passion of Jesus, and of purgatory. These became more frequent in her later years, and her records of them, and devotions built around them, became popular during the Middle Ages. In 1436, the Council of Basel confirmed their orthodoxy.

Bridget was declared a patron saint of Europe in 2000, an honour she shares with Benedict of Norcia, the

brothers Cyril and Methodius, Catherine of Siena and Edith Stein.

## **SAINT SHARBEL MAKHLOUF: 24 July**

On 8 May 1828, in a mountain village in Lebanon, Youssef Makhlof was born, the youngest of five children of a poor Arabic-speaking Maronite Catholic family. His father, Anton, died when he was only two, but an uncle undertook the support of the family. His mother, Brigita, led a life of intense prayer and fasted daily. The values she imparted to her children were prayer, work and perseverance. Youssef was profoundly affected by the example of two maternal uncles, who were monks of the Maronite Order, living in a hermitage five km. away, whom he often visited.

By the time he was sixteen, he had completed his basic education under an oak tree in the village churchyard, where, with the other village boys, he was taught by the priest. The Christian spirit of the village was remarkable, the men regarding it as a privilege to ring the church bell for Sunday Mass. Youssef worked as a shepherd, and during his time on the hillside, often retired to a cave to pray. It was said that he used to tell his one cow, ‘Rest now and be quiet; I’m going to say my prayers.’ He valued solitude and the opportunity it afforded for prayer. He served Mass every morning, and came to see his purpose in life as being, like Jesus, a victim offered to God the Father. He was influenced by a monk who said to him, ‘To be nothing more than a servant of Christ is to feel light and free, to have nothing to fear, nothing to lose. To pray with the certainty of being heard by the



God of the poor - is that not a life no one would want to exchange for that of the wealthy and powerful?'

At the age of twenty-three, Youssef entered the monastery of Our Lady of Lebanon, at Annaya, north of Byblos, where he became a novice, and chose the name of Sharbel, after a martyr of the church of Antioch. His mother and his teacher both thought he had no vocation and urged him to return home. However, after two years of novitiate, in 1853, he professed vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Sharbel then began the study of philosophy and theology. His ordination to the priesthood took place in 1858, after which he was sent to Saint Maron monastery. His teachers gave him a good education and nurtured in him a love of monastic life.

During his sixteen years at Saint Maron monastery, Sharbel performed his priestly ministry and his monastic duties faithfully. He dedicated himself to Christ with undivided heart and desired to live in silence before the Nameless One.

In 1875, he was given permission to live at Saints' Peter and Paul hermitage on a hill near the monastery. His twenty-three years of solitary life there were lived in a spirit of abandonment to God. He prayed daily from midnight till 11 a.m., when he began Mass. One day he cured a violent, insane man, who went to the chapel when Sharbel told him to. When Sharbel placed a copy

of the Gospel on his head and prayed, the man became calm and silent, and his cure lasted.

His companions in the hermitage were the Son of God as encountered in the Scriptures and in the Eucharist, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Eucharist became the centre of his life, the focus of his constant attention and affection. Though he did not have a place in the world, the world had a place in him, and he prayed constantly for its needs. Through prayer, manual work and penance he offered himself as a sacrifice so that the world would return to God. He used to pray, 'Father of Truth, behold your Son Jesus, a sacrifice pleasing to you; accept the offering of Him who died for us....' Sharbel did nothing unusual --- except become a saint.

On 16 December 1898, while reciting this prayer at the Holy Liturgy, Sharbel suffered a stroke. He died on Christmas Eve at the age of seventy. After his death, many miracles occurred. Sick and infirm people of all kinds have been healed: deaf, dumb, blind, paralytic, those with cancer, mental illness, etc. They are of every religion and country. Since his death, thousands of healings have been recorded. His remains are perfectly preserved, and he has become known to many because of the miracles attributed to him which have drawn large numbers to his tomb.

## SAINT JAMES, APOSTLE: 25 July

James, son of Zebedee and of Salome, and brother of John the apostle, was one of the first to join Jesus as a disciple, and his name is listed among the apostles. (Matthew 10.2; Mark 3.17; Luke 6.14) Nothing is known of his early life, though his family may have been well-off, since their father was able to hire workmen. He should not be confused with James, son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10.3), nor with James, the brother of the Lord (Matthew 13.55). Neither is he regarded as the author of the New Testament *Letter of James*.

The Synoptic Gospels state that James and John were with their father by the seashore; they were fishermen, and partners with Peter. When Jesus called them, they left their nets and their father, followed him and became 'fishers of men.' (Matthew 4.21-22; Mark 1.19-20) Later, James and John wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan town which had not received Jesus, but he rebuked them. (Luke 9.51-56) In Mark 3.17, he gave them the nickname *Boanerges* or "Sons of Thunder."

Along with Peter and John, James was chosen by Jesus to witness the Transfiguration. (Matthew 17.1-8; Mark 9.2-8; Luke 9.28-36) The same three were present when Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1.29), and raised Jairus' daughter to life. (Mark 5.37; Luke 8.51) They were together again with him near the Temple on the Mount of Olives (Mark 13.3), and in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14.33; Matthew 26.37).

This suggests close friendship between Jesus and Peter, James and John; it is possible that Jesus and James may have been cousins.

The Acts of the Apostles (12.1-2) records that Herod Agrippa I had James killed with the sword, some time between 41 and 44 AD, perhaps in 42. He is the only apostle whose martyrdom is recorded in the New Testament, and is traditionally believed to have been the first of them to die for the faith.

Salome, the mother of James and John (Mark 15.40; Matthew 27.56), or they themselves, asked Jesus to give them places, one at his right and one at his left, when he came into his kingdom (Matthew 20.20-28; Mark 10.35-45), and declared themselves ready to accept death with him. The two brothers are also mentioned as present on the lakeshore of Tiberias after Jesus' Resurrection. (John 21.2) And they were among those gathered in the upper room after the ascension. (Acts 1.13)

This James is known as James the Great to distinguish him from James the son of Alphaeus, who is known as the Less, and from James the brother of the Lord. (The "great" and "less" may have been simply a matter of height, or age.)

James is the patron saint of Spain, because, according to a tradition which began about 700 AD, he preached the Gospel there. Historically, this is extremely unlikely. Paul, in Romans 15.20-24, written about 58 AD, speaks of his intention of going to Spain because no one had yet

preached the Gospel there. According to the tradition of the early church, James had not left Jerusalem before his death between 41 and 44. (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VI; Apollonius, quoted by Eusebius, *Church History*. VI.18) His remains are said to be held in Santiago de Compostella in Galicia. The traditional pilgrimage to his shrine, known as the *Way of Saint James* (*Camino de Sant' Iago de Compostella*), has been the most popular pilgrimage for Western European Catholics from the early Middle Ages and has experienced a resurgence in modern times.

## **SAINTS JOACHIM AND ANNE: 26 July**

According to an old tradition, Joachim and Anne were the parents of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This is found among Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Muslims. But they are not mentioned in the Bible; the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew (1.1-16) and Luke (3.23-38) do not name either of Mary's parents. However, it is reasonable to assume that they were observant Jews if the evidence of their daughter Mary's devotion, as described in the Gospels, is any indicator: 'Rejoice, so highly favoured; the Lord is with you.' (Luke 1.28)

Saint John of Damascus wrote of Mary's parents, 'O blessed couple, all creation is in your debt, for through you is presented the noblest of gifts to the creator, namely, a spotless mother who alone was worthy of the creator.'

The celebration of Joachim was included in the liturgical calendar only in 1584. In the calendar of saints revised in 1969, it was joined to that of Anne, to be celebrated on 26 July.

The grand-parents of Jesus, whatever their names may have been - and it is not important what they were - could be considered the patron saints of grand-parents. And, in much of the Western world today, grand-parents are among the few people engaged in evangelization. Often, it is they, and sometimes only they, who pass on the faith to the young.

A prayer for grandparents: -  
Lord Jesus, you were born of the Virgin Mary.  
Look with love on grandparents the world over.  
Protect them! They are a source of enrichment for  
families, for the church and for all of society.  
Support them! As they grow older,  
may they continue to be for their families strong pillars  
of Gospel faith, guardian of noble domestic ideals, living  
treasures of sound religious traditions.  
Make them teachers with wisdom and courage, so that  
they may pass on to future generations the fruits of their  
mature and spiritual experience.

Lord Jesus, help families and society to value the  
presence and roles of grandparents.  
May they never be ignored or excluded, but always  
encounter respect and love.  
Help them to live serenely and to feel welcomed  
in all the years of life which you give them.  
Mary, Mother of all the living,  
keep grandparents constantly in your care,  
Accompany them on their earthly pilgrimage,  
and, by your prayers, grant that all families  
may one day be re-united in our heavenly homeland,  
where you await all humanity  
for the great embrace of life without end. Amen.  
(Adapted from Pope Benedict XVI)

## SAINT MARTHA: 29 July

We hear about Martha in three Gospel stories: Luke 10.38-42; John 11.1-44 and 12.1-2. Together with her siblings, Lazarus and Mary, she lived in the village of Bethany (today known as El Azariyeh) about six km. from Jerusalem. John says, 'Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.' (11.5) The omission by him of Mary's name may be significant.

In Luke 10.38-42, Martha welcomed Jesus into her house. (The fact that it was called *her* house, not Lazarus', was highly unusual in terms of the culture of the place, both then and now. It was, and is, normal there to speak of a house as the man's, in this case, Lazarus'. Not doing so has led some to believe that Lazarus was ill, disabled, or otherwise incapacitated, and so not considered significant. And, of course, he died before his sisters.) They are contrasted: Martha was 'busy about many things,' and asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her, but Jesus said that Mary had chosen 'the better part,' that of listening to him.

The story is controversial – clearly Mary had chosen the easier part; but it may be seen as giving priority to relationships over functions, and to prayer above action. Clearly, Martha was a worker and hospitable; perhaps she was simply taken for granted. In John 12.1-2, when Jesus visited Bethany, 'There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served.' Peter Kreeft suggests, 'We must do the works of Martha, but in the spirit of Mary.' As much as



Mary, Martha might have liked to sit down and listen to Jesus, but felt obliged by courtesy and hospitality to prepare food to offer him. It would have been a poor show if Martha had sat down like Mary and let a non-existent “someone else” do the work; Jesus, the guest, would have gone hungry and the two sisters would have been shamed. Martha is the one recognized as a saint; Mary is not, nor Lazarus, the one raised from death.

In John 11.1-44, Jesus went to Bethany to sympathize with the sisters following the death of their brother Lazarus. Martha, the good hostess, went out to meet him. It says much for the open character of their friendship that she felt free to criticize Jesus: ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ (v.21) It was like saying, ‘You let us down; if you had come when we asked (see v.3), Lazarus would still be with us.’ But, with great trust, she adds, ‘Even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.’ This leads to a short dialogue culminating in Martha making a great profession of faith in Jesus.

Mary did not go out to meet Jesus and did not come to him until called. (v.28) Neither is there an indication that she was preparing food or drink for the household’s invited guest. (v.3) She stayed or ‘sat’ (JB) at home (v.20). Yet the great saint of the contemplative life, Teresa of Ávila wrote, ‘Works are what the Lord wants!.... If we fail in this love of neighbour we are lost.’ (*The Interior Castle* 5.3.11-12)

Jesus went to the tomb, and ordered the stone to be taken away from its entrance. Martha, ever practical, says, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.' (v.39) Jesus once more leads her to faith, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' (v.40) And he raised Lazarus from death to life.

Jesus spent the last week of his life in Bethany, presumably with Martha and Mary. (Mark 11.11)

Martha is remembered not only as the worker, the hospitable one, and the practical one, but most of all as the person who, before the raising to life of Lazarus, made what is perhaps the greatest profession of faith in Jesus found anywhere in the New Testament: 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.' (John 11.27)

## SAINT PETER CHRYSOLOGUS: 30 July

Peter was born in Imola, Italy, about 380. Nothing is known of his early years, but he lived at a time when the Roman persecutions had passed, along with the major theological controversies, and a more settled church life had come into place. He was ordained deacon by Bishop Cornelius of Imola. Emperor Valentinian III exercised influence to have him made archdeacon. Pope Sixtus III appointed him bishop of Ravenna about the year 433, when it was the capital of the Western Roman Empire. In doing so, it seems he rejected the candidate elected by the people of the city.

There is a legend about this: it was said that Sixtus had a dream in which he saw Saints Peter and Apollinaris, the first bishops of Rome and Ravenna respectively. They showed him a young man and said he was to be the next bishop of Ravenna. When the group from Ravenna arrived, including Cornelius and his archdeacon Peter from Imola, Sixtus recognized Peter as the young man of his vision and ordained him bishop. (The story has the sound of *post factum* spin; pass the salt, please.)

Called the Doctor of Homilies, Peter was known for short inspired talks; he is said to have been afraid of boring his hearers. (In those days a sermon could last an hour and still be considered short! But, as a preacher of our own time has said, one minute is too long if the preacher has nothing to say.) Here is a sample of Peter's preaching : -

Listen to the Lord's appeal. In me, I want you to see your own body, your members, your heart, your bones, your blood. You may fear what is divine, but why not love what is human? You may run away from me as the Lord, but why not run to me as your father? Perhaps you are filled with shame for causing my bitter passion. Do not be afraid. This cross inflicts a mortal injury, not on me, but on death. These nails no longer pain me, but only deepen your love for me. I do not cry out because of these wounds, but through them I draw you into my heart. My body was stretched on the cross as a symbol, not of how much I suffered, but of my all-embracing love. I count it no loss to shed my blood: it is the price I have paid for your ransom. Come, then, return to me and learn to know me as your father, who repays good for evil, love for injury, and boundless charity for piercing wounds. (*Sermon 108: PL 52.499-500*)

We ask God to hallow his name, which, by its own holiness, saves and makes whole all creation... It is this name which gives salvation to a lost world. But we ask that this name of God should be hallowed in us through our actions. For God's name is blessed when we live well, but is blasphemed when we live wickedly.... We ask, then, that, just as the name of God is holy, so we may obtain his holiness in our souls. (*Sermon 71.4; PL 52.402A*)

After hearing his first homily as bishop, Empress Galla Placidia is said to have given him the nickname Chrysologus, or Golden Speech, by which he is known. In time, she became patroness of some of Peter's projects which included some significant buildings.

Peter spoke against Arian and Monophysite teachings, condemning them as heresies, and spoke in simple language about the Apostles' Creed, the mystery of the Incarnation, John the Baptist, and the Blessed Virgin Mary. He advocated daily Communion: on this he wrote, 'Christ himself is the bread who... furnishes the faithful each day with food from heaven.' (*Sermon 67*, PL 52.392) He urged his listeners to have confidence in the forgiveness offered through Christ, saying,

Our awareness of our status as slaves [to sin] would make us sink into the ground, and our earthly condition would dissolve into dust, if the authority of our Father himself and the Spirit of his Son had not impelled us to cry, 'Abba, Father' (Galatians 4.6)... When would a mortal dare call God "Father," if our innermost being were not animated by power from on high? (*Sermon 71.3*, PL 52.401CD)

Some one hundred and seventy-six of his homilies are preserved.

One of his sayings was, 'Christ is the kingdom of heaven.' (*Homily 89*; PL 52.475)

Peter was a counsellor of Pope Leo I. The Monophysite, Eutyches, appealed to Peter to intervene with the pope on his behalf after he was denounced at a synod held in Constantinople in 448. The text of Peter's response has been preserved in the *Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*. In it, Peter urged Eutyches to accept the ruling of the synod and to obey the bishop of Rome as successor to Saint Peter.

Peter, who was also a noted builder, died about 450, probably on 31 July. He was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1729. A contemporary portrait of him is found in the church of Saint John the Evangelist in Ravenna; he is depicted among members of the Roman imperial families, suggesting that he had close contact with them.

Peter's life illustrates an unsettling trend. In 313, by the Edict of Milan, Emperor Constantine decreed religious freedom for all. But Emperor Theodosius, in 381, declared Christianity the official religion of the Empire with attendant privileges and the persecution, including killing, of those considered heretics. The church, having moved from persecution to freedom, now began to cultivate relationships with the Establishment. In history, the church has been closer to the Gospel when it kept its distance from the state and had friends in low places more than high ones.

## SAINT IGNATIUS LOYOLA: 31 July

Iñigo Lopez de Loyola was a knight from a noble Basque family, born in 1491. The youngest of thirteen children, he was brought up by the local blacksmith's wife, when his own mother died soon after his birth. He used the name Ignatius, not intending to change it, but adopting for use in France and Italy a name he believed was simply a variant of his own and easier for foreigners to use.

Ignatius became a page in the service of an aristocratic relative. Then, at eighteen, he began a military career, participating in many battles without injury. But when the French army attacked Pamplona in May 1521, a cannonball wounded one of his legs and broke the other. Badly injured, but determined to preserve appearances, he underwent several operations, without anaesthetic. However, he walked with a limp for the rest of his life.

During his recovery, he underwent a spiritual conversion which resulted in a dramatic change to his lifestyle. A *Life of Christ* by Ludolph of Saxony inspired him to abandon military life and devote himself to God, following the example of Francis of Assisi, who had had a similar conversion experience also following a failed military career. Ludolph suggested to readers to place themselves at the scene of a Gospel story. This became the basis of the method that Ignatius later set out in his *Spiritual Exercises*. He went to the shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat in 1522, and hung up his military uniform

there. There also he had a vision of the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus. He then went to Manresa in Cataluña, in 1522-23, where he prayed daily for hours in a cave, while also writing the essentials of the *Exercises*, a kind of workshop manual of the spiritual life, designed to be carried out over a period of a month. For over four centuries these *Exercises* have helped men and women to discover the truth about themselves and to commit themselves more fully to God.

When the *Exercises* were finally printed in 1541, Ignatius was called before the Roman Inquisition for questioning about them, but released. His autobiography, written many years later, is seen as a key to understanding them. In them he wrote, 'We should always be ready to accept this principle: I will believe that the white that I see is black, if the hierarchical Church so defines it.' (Rules for thinking with the Church, n.13, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, translated by Anthony Mottola, introduction by Robert W. Gleason SJ, Image Books, Doubleday, New York, 1964, p.141) Perhaps his years as a soldier had given him that outlook, but it was not his best moment. However, he is remembered as a talented spiritual director.

In 1523, he went to the Holy Land to work for the conversion of non-Christians, but, after only three weeks, the Franciscans there sent him home. However, he never gave up on the idea.



Between 1524 and 1537, Ignatius studied theology and Latin in Spain, and then in Paris. By 1534, he had gathered six companions, among them Francis Xavier, all of whom he had met as students at Paris university. In 1534, they bound themselves by vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Ignatius was ordained in 1537. In 1539, he composed the Constitutions of the Company (Ignatius understood that term in the military sense) or Society, of Jesus, creating a monarchical organization that stressed absolute self-abnegation and obedience to pope and superiors - 'well-disciplined like a corpse' - as he put it. They pledged not to accept ecclesiastical office except under order from the pope. It was a new type of religious life without choral office, habit, religious names or elections to office, except that of General (also a military title), and with a fourth vow of obedience to the pope which he described as 'our first and principal foundation.' Someone said the new Society was one of 'hermits living in barracks'!

His Society was controversial, and perhaps it was with this in mind that he said,

It would be very bitter if my life-work, the Jesuit Order, should be dissolved. The establishment of my Society has been the object of my endeavours.... If it were to happen without my guilt, about fifteen minutes of meditation and recollection in prayer would banish all disquietude from my soul, even were the whole Society dissolved as salt in water!

The Society was in fact dissolved, in 1773, by Pope Clement XIV, a Franciscan, under pressure from the kings of Spain, Portugal and France – all Catholics! - but it was protected by King Frederick II, the Great, of Prussia, a Lutheran, Empress Catherine of Russia who was Orthodox, and by the Anglican kings of England in Britain and North America, until its restoration by Pope Pius VII in 1814. One reason for the hostility of the kings of Spain and Portugal in particular was that the Jesuits had considerable success in opposing slave-trading operations by colonists from those countries in South America, such as by the *Reductions* in Paraguay. (This forms the background to the film, *The Mission*.)

Returning to Spain, Ignatius and his companions were occupied with making disciples among women called as witnesses by the Inquisition. Because his preaching was associated with these women, Ignatius was again called for questioning by the Inquisition, but cleared.

The Jesuits undertook three special areas of work: missions abroad, especially in India, Japan and Brazil, the counter-Reformation, and education. Along with the Capuchins, the Jesuits were the principal driving-force behind the Catholic counter-Reformation. They opened a college in Sicily, and its rules and methods were afterwards copied in other colleges, both at second and third levels. The impact of the Jesuits on education in Europe was unparalleled. It was motivated by the desire to bring Gospel values to bear on day-to-day society, to catechize the culture.

His guiding principle, to which he committed himself throughout his life, was to do all 'For the greater glory of God.' (See 1 Corinthians 10.31) It became the Jesuit motto. He said,

In all these works they should desire and seek nothing but the greatest praise and glory of God our Lord. For all must realize that they will make progress in all spiritual matters in proportion to their flight from self-love, self-will, and self-interest. (*Directions for Amending and Reforming One's Life*)

A practical idealist, Ignatius used to say, 'Let us work as if success depended on our efforts alone, yet with the heartfelt conviction that we are doing nothing and God everything,' and also, 'Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words.' (*Contemplation to attain Divine Love*) He saw contemplation as 'the interior knowledge of the Lord' which motivated a person to love and follow him. (*Spiritual Exercises*, n.104)

Ignatius died in Rome of malaria on 31 July 1556. He was canonized in 1622, and declared patron of spiritual retreats in 1922.

Here are some of his best-known prayers: -

'Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous, to serve you as you deserve to be served; to give without counting the cost; to fight without heeding the wounds; to work without seeking for rest; to spend my life without

expecting any return other than the knowledge that I do your holy will. Amen.’

‘Take and receive, Lord, all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my will, all that I have and own. You gave them to me; to you, Lord, I return them. They are all yours; do with them what you will. Give me your love and your grace; these are enough for me; then I am rich enough. I do not ask anything more. Amen.’

‘Eternal Lord of all things, I make this offering with your grace and help, in the presence of your infinite goodness, and in the presence of your glorious mother, and of all the saints of your heavenly court, provided only that it be for your greater service and praise, to imitate you in bearing all injuries, all evils, and all poverty, both physical and spiritual, if your most sacred majesty should will to choose me for such a life and state.’

He also popularized the following prayer which has been attributed to Pope John XXII and to the Franciscan, Bernardine of Feltre: -

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.

Body of Christ, save me.

Blood of Christ, inebriate me.

Water from the side of Christ, wash me.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me.

O good Jesus, hear me;

within thy wounds, hide me;

suffer me not to be separated from you;

from the malignant enemy defend me;

in the hour of death call me;  
and bid me come to you,  
that with your saints I may praise you  
for ever and ever. Amen.

Ignatius also said: -

‘A bishop is most like God when he is silent.’

‘It is better to keep silence and to be, than to talk and not to be.’

‘We must adapt the Society [of Jesus] to the times, and not the times to the Society.’

‘I desire and choose poverty with the poor Christ rather than riches; insults with Christ loaded with them rather than honours. I desire to be accounted as worthless and as a fool for Christ rather than be esteemed as wise and prudent in this world. So Christ was treated before me.’

‘In time of desolation one should never make a change but stand firm and constant in the resolutions and decisions which guided the day before the desolation.’  
(*Rules for the Discernment of Spirits*, n.5)

## SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI: 1 August

Alphonsus Maria Anthony John Cosmas Damian Michael Gaspard de Liguori was born at Marianella, near Naples, Italy, on 27 September 1696, the first of seven children. He went to law school at the age of sixteen, and achieved high grades. But later, he had second thoughts about this, and wrote to a friend, 'Our profession is too full of difficulties and dangers. We lead an unhappy life, and run the risk of dying an unhappy death. I will quit this career, which does not suit me, for I wish to save my soul.' At the age of twenty-seven, having lost an important case through a basic error - the first he had lost in eight years - he abandoned law.

His father was outraged by this decision, regarding it as a betrayal of the family and of Alphonsus' intellectual ability. For many years, he would not speak to his son. Alphonsus studied for the priesthood in the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri, and was ordained at the age of thirty. He spent his first years as a priest with the homeless youth of Naples. He founded what were called *Evening Chapels* – centres of prayer, preaching, social activities, education and community. A significant feature is that the *Chapels* were managed by the young people themselves. At the time of his death, there were seventy-two of these with 10,000 active participants. He worked as a missionary in the countryside around Naples, where he found people poorer and more abandoned than the street children of the city. His preaching won back many

who were alienated from the church by the rigorism then prevalent in the sacrament of penance.

In 1731, he re-organized the Redemptoristine Sisters, who had been founded earlier by a friend of his, Bishop Tommaso Falcoia. The following year, he founded the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (the Redemptorists). Its goal was to preach in the slums of cities and among the poor. He fought against Jansenism, which took a rigorous and legalistic view of people's worthiness for the sacraments. He was also a musician, painter and poet. He loved the theatre, but it had a bad reputation at the time, so, when he went to it, he took off his glasses - he had poor sight - and just listened to the music! He put his artistic and literary gifts at the service of the mission, and asked those who joined his congregation to do the same.

It happened one day that his father was walking past a church, heard singing, and went inside to listen. He saw Alphonsus leading a congregation of young people in prayer and song. This was a moment of conversion for him: he accepted his son's vocation, and even asked to join his new congregation. Wisely, Alphonsus declined.

Alphonsus wrote one hundred and eleven works of spirituality and theology, which have run to 21,500 editions and been translated into seventy-two languages - which must be a record! He wrote to encourage devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Lady. Among the best known are *The Great Means of Prayer*, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ* and *Visits to the*

*Blessed Sacrament.* His first-hand experience of the pastoral needs of the people made him a great teacher.

The saints do not get it right all the time, and this was true of Alphonsus. He suffered from scruples for much of his adult life, and felt guilty about even the most minor matters. But surprisingly, he saw scruples as a blessing, writing, ‘Scruples are useful in the beginning of conversion.... they cleanse the soul, and at the same time make it careful.’ We might wonder whether his decision to abandon law wasn’t influenced by his scrupulosity. Perhaps because of his personal difficulties, his greatest contribution was in moral theology. His principal written work was his *Theologia Moralis*, written in 1753-55, which outlined a balanced system of dealing with issues of doubt which has been used substantially ever since. This arose out of his contact with people’s everyday problems, and from his ability to respond to them. He opposed legalism and rigorism, describing them as ‘paths closed to the Gospel.’ Coming from a background of personal scrupulosity, that was a big step forward and perhaps also providentially a way of helping others with similar difficulties. He had walked the walk.

In his later years, Alphonsus was expelled from his congregation, the Redemptorists; this must have been a severe blow to him. It is a common feature in the lives of the saints that they experienced most opposition from within, from those who might have been expected to support them, and a welcome from without. The same was true of Jesus.



Alphonsus and his Redemptorists pledged themselves to work for the most abandoned, especially those who live in country districts, and to refuse all dignities, benefices and offices outside the congregation. Despite this, he (reluctantly) became a bishop in 1762 and later a cardinal. He died at ninety-one, on 1 August 1787, was canonized in 1839, and declared a doctor of the church in 1871 for his contribution to moral theology. He is patron saint of confessors.

Here is a sample of his prayers: -

Most humble Jesus, give me a share of your humility. Take from my heart everything that displeases you; convert it totally to you, so that I may no longer will or desire anything other than what you will.

Dear Redeemer, relying on your promises, because you are faithful, all-powerful and merciful, we hope, through the merits of your passion, for the forgiveness of our sins, perseverance until death in your grace, and, at length, by your mercy, to see and love you eternally in heaven. Amen.

God sends us nothing that is too hard or painful to bear. He proportions all to our strengths and abilities. Our trials are suited to our needs as a glove to the hand of the wearer. All things will contribute to our sanctification if we but cooperate with the designs of Divine Providence.

Among his sayings are the following: -

‘All sanctity consists in the love of God, and the love of God consists in doing God’s will.’

‘It is impossible that someone who thinks often of the suffering and death of Jesus should not become full of love for him.’

‘The one who prays will certainly be saved; the one who does not pray will certainly be lost.’

‘Those who trust in themselves are lost; those who trust in God can do all things.’

## **SAINT EUSEBIUS of VERCELLI: 2 August**

Eusebius was born in Sardinia, Italy, perhaps about the start of the fourth century. He was a teacher in Rome before becoming first bishop of Vercelli in northern Italy, about 345. Saint Ambrose, in a letter written some twenty years after Eusebius' death, states that he had been chosen as bishop by the people in preference to local candidates because of his strong faith. (Letter 63, *To the people of Vercelli*)

One of Eusebius' initiatives was to set up monastic life. He was influenced by the *Life of Saint Anthony* [of Egypt], written by Saint Athanasius. He took the hermits of Egypt as his models; they became examples of Christian living which inspired several bishops of Northern Italy, including Saint Ambrose of Milan and Maximus of Turin. Saints make saints.

In 354, Pope Liberius invited Eusebius to join the bishop of Cagliari in asking Emperor Constantius II to convoke a council to end divisions over Arianism, and to recognize Athanasius of Alexandria as an authentic teacher of the faith. The synod was held in Milan in 355, and was attended by Eusebius. But the outcome was very different from what Liberius had hoped: it condemned Athanasius, because Constantius, for reasons of political pragmatism, wanted to promote Arianism. Eusebius opposed this, and so was exiled, first to Syria, then Turkey, and, finally, Egypt. Several letters about the

council, written either to or by Eusebius are extant, as are two letters written by him in exile.

Arianism was a doctrine which denied the full divinity of Christ. Where that question is concerned, there can be no half-way house: Jesus either is divine or he is not; he is either of supreme significance or he is of no special significance. You can't be "sort of," "kind of" or semi-divine. It is an all-or-nothing situation, and Eusebius, along with Athanasius and others, recognized that. But Arianism had imperial support and that led to a situation described by Saint Jerome as one where 'the whole world groaned to find itself Arian.' (Philip Hughes, *A Short History of the Catholic Church*, Burns and Oates, London, 1974, p.25) 'When Emperor Constantius II remarked, "My will is a canon," the danger [of the emperor prescribing doctrinal positions and controlling the church] was imminent.' (Cited by Thomas Owen Martin, 'The Independence of the Church', in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. CXXII, No.1, January 1950, p.39) In this crisis, it was laypeople who saved the orthodox teaching and the church with it, when most bishops had gone along with Arianism.

Constantius died in 361, and Julian, known as "the Apostate" since he had been a Christian but reverted to paganism, became emperor. But, in 362, he allowed exiled bishops to return to their sees. Eusebius passed through Alexandria and there attended Athanasius' synod. This confirmed the divinity of the Holy Spirit and orthodox doctrine on the Incarnation. It also agreed to deal mildly with bishops who had signed Arian creeds

under pressure, but imposed severe penalties on the leaders of several Arian factions.

While on his way home, Eusebius took the synod's decisions to Antioch, hoping to reconcile divisions there. But he failed in this mission, in part because issues of personality were as weighty in the dispute as doctrinal matters. But, with Saint Hilary of Poitiers, he continued working to overcome Arianism in the Western church.

Eusebius arrived home in 363. His diocese was largely pagan, especially in rural areas - the Latin word *paganus* means a country-dweller – and needed to be evangelized from the beginning. There were Christian communities in the towns. In the years left of life to him, Eusebius worked to promote the faith in his diocese. In this, he spoke of himself as being like a farmer cultivating plants. He died in Vercelli about 2 August in 371 or 372.

He was credited by Saint Jerome with translating into Latin a Greek commentary on the psalms by Eusebius of Caesarea, but it no longer exists. (*Of Famous Men*, c.56, and Letter 51, n. 2) In the cathedral at Vercelli, there is a *codex*, containing what is said to be the oldest Latin Gospel text, said by some to have been written by Eusebius, though other scholars question this attribution.

## **SAINT PETER JULIAN EYMARD: 2 August**

Peter Julian Eymard was born on 4 February 1811 at La Mure d'Isère in the French Alps. His father was a smith whose second wife was Julian's mother. Before his first communion on 16 March 1823, he walked to a local shrine to Our Lady. Later, he learned about the apparition of Our Lady of La Salette and travelled to various Marian shrines throughout France. All his life he had an intense devotion to Mary, the Mother of God.

When his mother died in 1828, he entered the novitiate of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, despite his father's opposition because he was his only son. Peter Julian's first attempt as a seminarian ended because of serious illness. But, after his father's death in 1831, he succeeded, with the help of his former Oblate superior, in gaining admission to the seminary of Grenoble diocese. On 20 July 1834, he was ordained for Grenoble.

On his second assignment, the parish, which had a dilapidated church and priest's house, was a farming community with only a few people attending Mass. It had not had a resident priest for some time. The bishop urged Peter's two sisters to move with him to the house, which they did. In fact, they furnished it, for the parish was very poor. Later, when the call to religious community came to Peter Julian, he decided to join the Society of Mary (Marists). His sisters were shocked, as they had committed themselves to serving him.

In 1839, he joined the Marists, where he became a well-respected spiritual advisor with seminarians and priests. He worked with the Third Order of Mary and other lay organizations to promote devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to the Eucharist, particularly in the Forty Hours' devotion. He became Provincial of the Society of Mary at Lyon in 1845.

His Eucharistic spirituality developed gradually. He became familiar with the practice of sustained Eucharistic worship during a visit to Paris, where he met members of the Association of Nocturnal Adorers who had established exposition and perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at the Basilica of Our Lady of Victories. He moved to establish a Marist community dedicated to Eucharistic adoration. However, his desire to establish a separate fraternity promoting adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was not seen as part of the charism of the Marists. His superiors disapproved, and transferred him. Eventually, he resolved to leave the Society of Mary to begin a new religious congregation with the diocesan priest Raymond de Cuers.

On 13 May 1856, bishops of the Paris region consented to Peter Julian's plans for a Society of the Blessed Sacrament. After many trials, he and de Cuers established public exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in Paris on 6 January 1857 in a run-down building at the inaptly-named rue d'Enfer (the Street of Hell). In this they were encouraged by Saint John Vianney (the Curé d'Ars). Peter Julian counted among his friends the

Marist saint Marcellin Champagnat and the martyr Peter Chanel.

The Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament began working with children in Paris to prepare them for their first Communion. It also reached out to non-practising Catholics, inviting them to resume receiving Communion. Peter Julian established a common rule for the members of the society and worked for papal approval, which he obtained in 1858 from Pope Pius IX. He was a tireless proponent of frequent Holy Communion, an idea later given authoritative support by Pope Pius X in 1905. He used to say, 'You take communion to become holy, not because you are holy.'

In 1858, together with Marguerite Guillot, he founded the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, a contemplative congregation for women.

Peter Julian experienced many difficulties in reaching his goals, including poverty in his family and in his newly founded community, years of serious illness and pain, a Jansenistic striving for perfection, and the difficulties of obtaining diocesan and, later, papal approval of his community.

The French sculptor Auguste Rodin entered the Congregation as a lay brother in 1862, having given up art after the death of his sister. Eymard recognized his talent and advised him to return to his vocation. Rodin later produced a bust of him.



Peter Julian died on 1 August 1868. He was canonized by Pope John XXIII on 9 December 1962, and Pope John Paul II named him "Apostle of the Eucharist."

## **SAINT JOHN VIANNEY: 4 August**

Jean-Baptiste Marie Vianney was born on 8 May 1786, in the town of Dardilly, near Lyons, France, and was baptized the same day. His parents, Matthieu Vianney and Marie Beluze, had six children, of whom John was the fourth. The Vianneys helped the poor, and gave hospitality to the tramp saint, Benedict Joseph Labre, who passed through their town on his way to Rome.

By 1790, the French Revolution forced many priests to hide from the government in order to administer the sacraments in their parishes. It was illegal to attend Mass, so the Vianneys travelled to distant places where they could do so in secret. Since priests risked their lives day by day, Vianney came to look upon them as heroes. He made his first communion at the age of thirteen. During the Mass, the windows were covered so that the light of the candles could not be seen from the outside. This secrecy continued during his preparation for confirmation. During this time he worked herding cattle.

In 1802, the Catholic Church was re-established in France, and this brought religious peace to the country. Vianney was concerned about his future vocation and longed for an education. He was twenty when his father allowed him to leave the farm to be taught at Fr. Balley's "presbytery school" in a neighbouring village. Vianney struggled, especially with Latin, and failed almost every exam, partly because his education had been disrupted by the Revolution. Only because of his deep desire to be

a priest - and Fr. Balley's great patience - did he continue.

His studies were interrupted in 1804 when he was drafted into Napoleon's army. As an ecclesiastical student, he should have been exempt, but Napoleon withdrew the exemption in certain dioceses because of the need for soldiers in his war against Spain. Two days after he was due to report at Lyons, Vianney became ill and was hospitalized, during which time his group left without him. Once discharged from hospital, he was sent to join another group. He went into a church to pray, and fell behind the group. He met a young man who offered to guide him back to it, but instead led him to a mountain village where deserters had gathered.

Vianney lived there for fourteen months, hidden in a cowshed attached to a farm under the care of Claudine Fayot, a widow with four children. He assumed the name Jérôme Vincent, and under that name he opened a school for village children. He who had seemed incapable of learning became a teacher! Since the harsh weather isolated the town during the winter, the deserters were safe from the police. However, after the snow melted, they came to the town constantly, searching for them. During these searches, Vianney hid inside haystacks in a barn. An imperial decree of 1810 granted amnesty to all deserters, which enabled Vianney to go back to resume his studies legally. He went first to a minor seminary, and then, in 1813, to a major seminary at Lyons. Considered too slow, he was returned to Fr. Balley. The latter, however, persuaded the vicars general that

Vianney's piety was sufficient compensation for his ignorance of theology. As a result he was ordained in 1815. He was appointed assistant to Fr. Balley, who was his great inspiration because of his loyalty to the faith despite the Revolution. In 1818, shortly after Fr. Balley's death, Vianney was appointed parish priest of Ars-en-Dombe, a village of two hundred and thirty people, of whom only a handful attended Sunday Mass, while the great majority was uninformed and uninterested. The bishop said to him, 'There is not much love of God in that parish; you'll have to put it there.'

Vianney realized that the prevailing ignorance of the faith was due to the virtual destruction of the church in France by the Revolution. Sundays in rural areas were spent working in the fields, or dancing and drinking in taverns. He preached against blasphemy and dancing, and, if parishioners did not give up the latter, he refused them absolution. He lived an ascetic life, living mostly on potatoes. He saw things in black-and-white terms: everything was either for or against God. He had a saying, 'Do only what you can offer to God,' but also, 'To be able to do people good we must first love them.'

He used to see a local man praying in the church from time to time, and once asked him about his prayer. The man replied, 'I look at him [Jesus], and he looks at me. We understand each other.' John Vianney himself, despite the intense demands of pastoral ministry on his time, spent hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. This infused his preaching to such an extent

that, sometimes, he would stop in the middle of a sermon to point to the tabernacle, and say, 'He is there!'

Within eight years not only was the parish transformed but his influence went further. He came to be known far and wide, and people from distant places began to come to consult him. By 1855, the number of pilgrims to Ars had reached 20,000 a year; by 1858, it was 30,000. During the last ten years of his life, he spent sixteen to eighteen hours a day in the confessional. The bishop even forbade him to attend the annual retreat of the diocesan clergy because of the numbers waiting for him in the confessional. It has been said of him that, 'The Curé d'Ars knew nearly nothing about psychology but he knew nearly everything about human nature because he knew so much about God.' (R. H. S. Steuart, "St. John Vianney: the Curé d'Ars" in F. J. Sheed, p.371)

Vianney had great devotion to Saint Philomena, regarding her as his guardian. He erected a chapel and shrine in her honour. In 1843, he became so ill that he thought he was dying. He asked Saint Philomena to cure him, and promised to say a hundred Masses at her shrine if he recovered. Twelve days later, he was cured, and attributed it to Saint Philomena.

He experienced great temptations which he attributed to demonic influence, believing that he could hear demons saying of him, 'He is ours! We have him!' Some see this as evidence of psychological imbalance due to an obsession with sin and Satan. For him, the only good was the love of God, and the only evil was sin. He said,

‘The greatest of evils is not to be tempted, because there are then grounds for believing that the devil looks on us as his own.’ He used also say, ‘To be a saint... one must lose one’s head.’ But there was also joy in his life, and he liked to say, ‘It is always Springtime in the heart that loves God.’ He longed to be a monk, and, four times, ran away from Ars, the last time in 1853. He died in 1859 aged seventy-three. Three hundred priests and more than six thousand people attended his funeral.

Biographers record miracles performed throughout his life, such as obtaining money for his charities, and food for an orphanage of destitute girls, called “The Providence.” Awarded a medal by Emperor Napoleon III, he had to be dissuaded from selling it to raise money for the orphanage. It was said that he had supernatural knowledge of the past and the future, and could heal the sick, especially children. His saintly life, his penance, his persevering ministry in the sacrament of confession, and his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary were a large part of his attraction. Pope Pius XI canonized him in 1925, and declared him patron saint of parish clergy in 1929. Vianney used to say, ‘Priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus.’

Here is one of his prayers: -

‘I love you, o my God, and my only desire is to love you until the last breath of my life. I love you, o my infinitely lovable God, and I would rather die loving you, than live without loving you. I love you, Lord, and the only grace I ask is to love you eternally.... My God, if my tongue

cannot say in every moment that I love you, I want my heart to repeat it to you as often as I draw breath.’

*Note*

As an illustration of the attitudes of the French Revolution to the Catholic faith, after the first few years of relative tolerance, General Jean Joseph Amable Humbert (of Killala and Ballinamuck in '98, the year of the French) was sent by the Revolution's Directory to suppress a royalist revolt. On completing his task, he reported back to it that, 'I have not left a single Catholic alive in the Vendée.' And the young Napoleon Bonaparte, while an artillery officer in the army of the revolution, oversaw the execution of Catholic soldiers because they had had their children baptized.

Later, Napoleon eased restrictions on the church, but for reasons of political expediency. He said, 'If France were a nation of Jews, I would re-build the temple of Solomon....' And, 'I regard religion, not as the mystery of the Incarnation, but as the secret of the social order.' (Cited by Robert Aubrey Noakes, 'Napoleon's Attitude towards Religion', *The Month*, Vol. CLXXVII, No.919, January-February 1941, p.33)

## **POPE SAINT SIXTUS II and Companions: 7 August**

Sixtus (or Xystus) II was bishop of Rome from 30 August 257 to 6 August 258. He is said by some to have been Greek by birth. On becoming pope, he restored good relations with the African and Eastern Orthodox churches which had been damaged under his predecessor, Pope Saint Stephen I. Stephen had condemned the teaching of Saint Cyprian of Carthage that people who had abandoned the faith in times of persecution should be re-baptized. In a letter to one Dionysius of Alexandria, Sixtus defended the validity of baptism administered by heretics.

In the persecutions under Emperor Valerian in 258, numerous bishops, priests, and deacons were put to death. Sixtus was one of the first, being arrested while teaching in a cemetery, then beheaded on the spot, along with six deacons, on 6 August. His name is included at Mass in the first Eucharistic prayer, the Roman canon.

The following was inscribed on his tomb in the cemetery of Callistus by order of Pope Damasus I: -

At the time when the sword pierced the bowels of the Mother [the Church], I, buried here, taught as pastor the Word of God, when suddenly the soldiers rushed in and dragged me from the chair. The faithful offered their necks to the sword, but as soon as the pastor saw those who wished to rob him of the palm [of martyrdom] he was the first to offer



himself and his own head, not tolerating that the [pagan] frenzy should harm the others. Christ, who gives recompense, made manifest the pastor's merit, preserving the flock unharmed. (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 33. 383–4)

## **SAINT CAJETAN: 7 August**

Cajetan (Gaetano) dei Conti di Tiene, was born on 1 October 1480. He was brought up religiously by his mother. He studied law in Padua, receiving a degree as doctor of both civil and canon law at the age of twenty-four. In 1506, he worked as a diplomat for Pope Julius II, and helped to bring about reconciliation between him and the Republic of Venice.

Cajetan was ordained priest in 1516 at the age of thirty-six. When his mother died the following year, he went to live in Vicenza. He founded a hospital there for incurables. He was as much devoted to spiritual healing as to physical. He set out to form a group that would combine monasticism with active ministry.

His new congregation, called "the Oratory of Divine Love," based on these ideals was set up in 1524. Its members came to be known as the Theatines, from the city of Theate (Chieti in Italian), where it began. One of its first members was John Peter Carafa, who later became Pope Paul IV. It grew slowly, in part because of warfare at the time. Cajetan had to flee to Venice, where he met Saint Jerome Emiliani, whom he helped to set up his congregation.

Cajetan died in Naples on 7 August 1547, and was canonized in 1671. He is regarded as the patron saint of job seekers, especially in Argentina and Malta where his cult is very popular.

## **SAINT DOMINIC: 8 August**

Dominic was born about 1170 in Calaruega, Spain. The names of his parents are uncertain, but they may have been Juana and Felix de Guzmán. He studied at Palencia, and went to university, where he spent ten years. In 1191, when Spain was desolated by a famine, he was in the middle of his theological studies. Legend has it that he gave away his money and sold his clothes, his furniture, and even manuscripts with his personal notes, to relieve distress. When his friends expressed surprise that he should sell his parchments, he is said to have replied, ‘Would you have me study dead skins when living skins are dying of hunger?’ In 1194, when he was twenty-four, he joined the Canons Regular at Osma, following the Rule of Saint Augustine. He became prior of the cathedral chapter there about 1201.

In that same year, he was sent with Diego, the new bishop of Osma, to Denmark on a diplomatic mission. On the way back he met Albigensians in Languedoc, France. Albigensianism was a new form of Manicheism, taking its name from the town of Albi, in Provence. The first of them he met was an innkeeper in whose house they spent a night. Dominic became involved in a lengthy discussion with him, and brought him to conversion. He later visited the Cistercian monastery at Cîteaux to meet the monks who had been given responsibility for the Church’s response to the heresy. He felt that they were going about the task the wrong

way, were alienating the Albigensians, and making matters worse.

Dominic saw the need for a new organization in the church to address the needs of his time, one that would bring the systematic education of the older monastic orders to bear on the religious problems of the growing population of the cities. In contrast to either the monastic orders or the secular clergy, it would have a democratic system of government and flexibility in lifestyle. In particular, the church needed preachers in view of pervasive ignorance of the faith. He asked Pope Innocent III for permission to go to Russia to preach but was persuaded by him to stay nearer home.

In 1203 or 1204, while in the south of France, Dominic encountered the Cathars, also Manichees, a religious sect with gnostic and dualistic beliefs. They ordained women as well as men; their clergy was celibate and vowed to poverty, but they did not accept papal authority. In 1208, Dominic met the papal legates returning in pomp to Rome, having failed in their attempt to counter them. Perhaps it was this which moved him to say,

Heretics are converted by an example of humility and other virtues far more readily than by any external display or verbal battles. So let us arm ourselves with devout prayers and set off barefoot, showing signs of genuine humility to combat Goliath.

Pope Innocent III launched a crusade against the Albigensians. What part Dominic had in it, and in the accompanying episcopal inquisition, is unclear. There is abundant documentation from early Dominican and papal sources that he was actively involved, perhaps even leading it. Some sources boast of it. Others dispute this, with a nineteenth century historian saying, 'It is safe to say that no tradition of the Church rests on a slender basis.' (Henry Charles Lea, *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, Book I, Chapter VI.) It is even said that he refused a direct command from the pope to participate in it. The order he founded, with its focus on preaching, was his personal response to the situation.

(The Inquisition, with which Dominic is often associated, came into being ten years after his death. The tortures later associated with it were prohibited in its early years.)

In 1215, Dominic established himself, with six followers, in a house in Toulouse. He and his companions adopted monastic rules of prayer and penance based on the Rule of Saint Augustine, and the bishop gave them authority to preach. In 1217, Pope Honorius III gave approval for the order to be named the Order of Preachers; but they became popularly known as the Dominicans, and quickly spread to Italy, France and Spain. Dominic also founded an order of sisters, beginning at Prouille, France. In Franciscan tradition, it is said that Dominic and Francis of Assisi met, and got on so well that Dominic suggested uniting their two

orders. Francis declined - which was probably a good decision.

Biographers such as Cecilia Cesarini describe Dominic as compassionate, joyful and wholly committed to the truth, which indeed he made the motto of his order, believing that only by knowing truth may a person become true. He lived a life of extraordinary penance: fasting, silence, long prayer, walking barefoot, wearing poor clothing, never sleeping on a bed, etc. In view of this, it is perhaps not surprising that he lived to be only fifty-one. He contracted fever – a word of many meanings in those days – and instructed his confrères to lay him on a sack on the floor. He said to them, as recorded by his biographer and successor, Blessed Jordan of Saxony, ‘Do not cry for me, because I will be more use to you after my death, and I will help you then more effectively than during my life.’ He died in Bologna at midday on 6 August 1221.

The spread of the rosary is attributed to the preaching of Dominic. Pope Pius XI stated that, ‘The rosary of Mary is the principle and foundation on which the Order of Saint Dominic rests for making perfect the life of its members and obtaining the salvation of others.’ For centuries, Dominicans have been instrumental in spreading it.

## **SAINT MARY HELEN McKILLOP: 8 August**

Mary Helen MacKillop was born in Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia, on 15 January 1842, to Scottish parents, the eldest of eight children. She was educated privately by her father, as there was no public school system. He had intended becoming a priest, but left just before ordination. He was not a good provider for the family, being unable to persevere in a job or to succeed at farming. The family had to survive on whatever wages the children brought home.

Mary Helen started work at the age of fourteen as a clerk, and later as a teacher. To provide for her family, she took a job as governess. Later, she opened a girls' boarding school. Her parish priest, Father Julian Woods, was concerned about the lack of Catholic education in South Australia. He invited Mary Helen and two of her blood sisters to open a Catholic school. Woods was appointed director of education and became the founder, along with Mary Helen, of a school they opened in a stable. After renovations by their brother, they started teaching, with more than fifty children.

At this time, Mary Helen made a declaration of her dedication to God. In 1867, she became the first sister and the superior of the newly formed Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart. They wore a brown habit and became popularly known as "the Brown Joeys." Mary Helen became Sister Mary of the Cross. Dedicated to the education of the poor, it was the

first religious order founded by an Australian; its rule of life was approved by Bishop Laurence Shiel. The congregation expanded rapidly so that, by 1871, a hundred and twenty nuns were working in more than forty schools and institutions across South Australia and Queensland, caring for neglected children, girls in danger, the aged poor, and the incurably ill. The sisters were prepared to follow farmers, railway workers and miners into the outback and to live as they lived. They shared the same hardships, while educating their children. This way of life evoked criticism from some, who said they were failing to behave like “proper nuns.”

As is often the case, trouble came from within. Bishop Shiel was an ineffective leader of his diocese, and serious division resulted among the clergy. One effect of this was a campaign by some priests against the Brown Joeys. As well as allegations of financial incompetence, rumours were spread that some sisters were possessed by the devil and that Mary herself was an alcoholic. She had never concealed the fact that she drank alcohol on doctor's orders.

In 1870, Mary and other sisters heard allegations that an Irish priest had been sexually abusing children. As a result, he was sent back to Ireland, the reason given publicly for this being that he was said to be an alcoholic. Another Irish priest, a friend of the dismissed man, became acting vicar general and influenced Bishop Shiel against the sisters. He persuaded him to change their Constitutions so that they would come under his control. Mary put forward alternative proposals as a



compromise, but, on the following day, 22 September 1871, the bishop excommunicated her, citing insubordination.

Though the congregation was not disbanded, most of their schools were closed in the wake of this action. Contact between her and any member of the church was forbidden. Fortunately, there were some Jesuits who had the good judgment to know when it is right to disobey, and they helped her. But her greatest support came from a Jewish family who gave her a roof over her head and food on the table during her time of excommunication. Some sisters chose to remain under diocesan control, becoming a new congregation, also called the Sisters of Saint Joseph, or Josephites, but popularly known, because of the colour of their habit, as "the Black Joeys." Later, as he was dying, Bishop Shiel lifted the excommunication. A church commission was later to exonerate Mary, and found the bishop's action canonically invalid. But she was left with the task of trying to undo the damage he had done. Many schools and other institutions had closed as a result of his action.

In 1873, Mary went to Rome to seek papal approval of her congregation. Pope Pius IX, who jokingly called her Sister Mary the Excommunicated One, encouraged her, and approved a revised interim form of the sisters' Constitutions. One change was that the Superior General and her council, not the local bishop, would be in charge. While in Europe, Mary travelled widely to observe educational methods. During this period, the sisters expanded into New South Wales and New Zealand. The

first general chapter of the new congregation elected Mary as its Superior General in 1875.

But issues remained. Several bishops still refused to accept her authority and that of her council. They would not accept the sisters unless they (the bishops) controlled them, so the sisters either left or were expelled from their dioceses. Despite Rome's approval of the Sisters' Constitutions, a majority of bishops, in 1885, still refused to accept them. But, in 1887, Rome over-ruled the bishops, and Pope Leo XIII gave final approval to the sisters the following year.

The archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Patrick Francis Moran, an Irishman, as were most of the other bishops, acting without authority, and contrary to the Sisters' Constitutions, removed Mary from office, describing her as "contentious." When the successor he appointed died, Mary was unanimously re-elected by the sisters, and she held that position until her death in Sydney on 8 August 1909. Reconciliation with Queensland was brought about in 1900. By the time of her death, the congregation had 750 sisters in 106 houses, serving in 117 schools.

Mary used to say to her sisters: -

'Whatever troubles may be before you, accept them cheerfully, remembering whom you are trying to follow. Do not be afraid. Love one another, bear with one another, and let charity guide you in all your life.'

‘Do all you can with the means at your disposal and leave the rest to God.’

‘Never see a need without doing something about it.’

**SAINT TERESA BENEDICTA of the CROSS:  
9 August**

Edith Stein was born into an observant Jewish family on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, 12 October 1891, in Breslau, then part of the German Empire, now Wrocław in Poland. She was a gifted child who enjoyed learning. She greatly admired her mother's strong faith, but, by her teenage years, had herself become an atheist.

At twenty-five, Edith was awarded a doctorate in philosophy with a dissertation entitled, *On the Problem of Empathy*. She then became a member of the university faculty in Freiburg. But, because she was a woman, she was not allowed to take an academic chair, and her second thesis *Psychic Causality* was rejected.

Edith had had early contact with the Catholic faith, especially through Max Scheler, but, during summer holidays at the age of thirty, she read the autobiography of Saint Teresa of Ávila. When she had finished, she said, 'This is truth. This is what I have been looking for.' It brought her to faith; saints make saints.

Baptized on 1 January 1922, she gave up her university position to teach at the Dominican sisters' school in Speyer from 1923 to 1931. While there, she translated Saint Thomas Aquinas' *On Truth* into German. She studied Scholastic philosophy and tried to interpret the philosophy of her former teacher Edmund Husserl in

terms of it. (A later student of Husserl's philosophy was one Karol Wojtyła, better known as Pope John Paul II.) In 1932, she became a lecturer at the Institute for Pedagogy in Münster, but anti-Semitic legislation forced her out of her job just a year later. She experienced discrimination, first because she was a woman, and then because she was Jewish.

In a letter to Pope Pius XI, she denounced the Nazi regime and asked him to do likewise openly. She wrote,

As a child of the Jewish people, who, by the grace of God, for the past eleven years has also been a child of the Catholic Church, I dare to speak to the Father of Christianity about that which oppresses millions of Germans. For weeks we have seen deeds perpetrated in Germany which mock any sense of justice and humanity, not to mention love of neighbour. For years, the leaders of National Socialism have been preaching hatred of the Jews... But the responsibility must fall, after all, on those who brought them to this point, and it also falls on those who keep silent in the face of such happenings.

Everything that happened and continues to happen on a daily basis originates with a government that calls itself 'Christian.' For weeks, not only Jews but also thousands of faithful Catholics in Germany, and, I believe, all over the world have been waiting and hoping for the Church of Christ to raise its voice to put a stop to this abuse of Christ's name.

Edith received no reply, and it is not known whether the pope ever received or read her letter. However, on 14 March 1937, he issued an encyclical letter in German, *Mit brennender Sorge* (*With burning anxiety*) in which he strongly criticized Nazism, listed breaches of the concordat signed between Germany and the church in 1933, and condemned anti-Semitism. Among other things he said,

The unwritten law of the other party [the Nazis] has been arbitrary misinterpretation of agreements, evasion of agreements, evacuation of the meaning of agreements, and finally more or less open violation of agreements. (n.6)

On 6 September 1938, the pope said, ‘Anti-Semitism... is a hateful movement, a movement that we cannot, as Christians, take any part in. Anti-Semitism is inadmissible. We are all spiritually Semites.’ But, in the same address, immediately before the above, he had also said, ‘We recognize everyone’s right to defend themselves, to take measures to protect themselves against all who threaten their legitimate interests.’ In the context, the latter could only have meant Jews. (See David I. Kertzer, *The Popes against the Jews: the Vatican’s Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism*, Vintage Books, New York, 2001, p.280)

Edith entered the Carmelite monastery at Cologne in 1933 and took the name of Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. There she wrote her metaphysical book, *Finite*

*and Eternal Being*, which tried to combine the philosophies of Aquinas and Husserl.

To escape the growing Nazi threat, her order transferred her to their monastery at Echt in the Netherlands. There she wrote *The Science of the Cross: Studies on John of the Cross*. Her testament of 6 June 1939 states,

I beg the Lord to take my life and my death ... for all concerns of the sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary and the holy church, especially for the preservation of our holy order, in particular the Carmelite monasteries of Cologne and Echt, as atonement for the unbelief of the Jewish people, and that the Lord will be received by his own people, and his kingdom shall come in glory, for the salvation of Germany and the peace of the world, at last for my loved ones, living or dead, and for all God gave to me: that none of them will go astray.

But Edith was not safe in the Netherlands either, because it was invaded and occupied by the Germans in 1940. The Dutch Catholic bishops and leaders of the Protestant churches agreed to read a letter in all churches of the country on 20 July 1942, condemning Nazi racism. In the event, the Protestant churches withdrew, and it was only the Catholic church which did it. In retaliation, the Nazi ruler of the Netherlands, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, on 26 July 1942, ordered the arrest of all Jewish converts who had previously been spared. Edith and her sister Rosa, also a convert and extern Carmelite,

were arrested and sent to Auschwitz concentration camp. German Jews were officially classified by the Nazis as *Der Abschaum der Nation*, the scum of the nation. Edith and Rosa are presumed to have been gassed on 9 August 1942, when Edith was fifty. She had earlier written, 'I am satisfied with everything. The only way of gaining knowledge of the cross is by feeling its weight. I have been convinced of this from the first moment.'

Edith was killed because of her race, not her faith, because she was Jewish, not because she was Catholic. She was canonized by Pope John Paul II as a martyr because the Dutch bishops' teaching against racism was the immediate catalyst of her murder. Her canonization angered many Jews who saw it as an attempt to co-opt her death as a Jew to the church, and as an attempt to portray the church's resistance to Nazism as being more assertive than it really was.

Throughout her time as a Carmelite, Teresa Benedicta continued to pray for her family of origin, her Jewish people, and for Germany. She is one of the six patron saints of Europe, along with Saints Benedict, Cyril and Methodius, Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena.



## SAINT LAWRENCE: 10 August

Lawrence was from Huesca in Spain. He became a deacon of the church of Rome, serving under Pope Sixtus II. In 258, Emperor Valerian issued an edict, commanding that all bishops, priests, and deacons be put to death. This was immediately carried out in Rome. On 6 August, Pope Sixtus II was executed by decapitation, the usual method. Four days later, on 10 August, Lawrence, the last of the seven deacons, was also put to death. (Cyprian, *Letter* 80, 1)

There is a story from Saint Ambrose (*De Officiis*, 28) that, after the death of Sixtus, the prefect of Rome demanded that Lawrence turn over the riches of the church to the emperor. Lawrence asked for three days to gather it together. During that time, he distributed as much church property to the poor as possible. On the third day, he presented himself to the prefect, and, when ordered to give up the treasures of the church, he presented the poor, the crippled, the blind and the suffering, saying that they were the treasures of the church. This act of defiance led to his martyrdom.

Ambrose is also the source of the tradition (*De officiis*, 41) that Lawrence was roasted to death on a gridiron. But he is not the source of the legend that, while being roasted, Lawrence joked, saying, ‘Turn me over; I’m done on this side.’ It has been suggested that the gridiron story resulted from a mistaken transcription, the omission of the letter ‘p’ from the Latin ‘passus est’ –

meaning, he suffered, that is, was martyred – coming to read ‘assus est’ – meaning, he was roasted. It is quite possible that, between his death in 258 and the time of Ambrose (339-397), legends grew up about him. However, there is no doubt that he was a real person, nor about his martyrdom, its place or date.

Since the fourth century, Lawrence has been one of the most revered saints of the church. His name is included in the first Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass. As his martyrdom occurred early in church history, non-Catholic Christians honour him as well.

(The memory of his companion martyr, Pope Saint Sixtus II, is recalled on 7 August.)

## **SAINT CLARE OF ASSISI: 11 August**

Clare, or Chiara, Offreduccio, was born in Assisi, Italy, on 16 July 1194, the eldest daughter of minor local nobility. Her mother, Ortolana, was a devout woman who had undertaken pilgrimages to Rome, Santiago de Compostella and the Holy Land. Later on in life, Ortolana, and her daughter Agnes, joined Clare in the monastery.

As a child, Clare was devoted to prayer. When she reached the age of fifteen, her parents arranged for her to marry a young and wealthy man, but she wished to wait until she was eighteen. But by then, she had heard Francis of Assisi preach, and that changed her life.

On the night of Palm Sunday 1212, she ran away from home to follow Francis. He admitted her to his way of life at the Portiuncula, saying, 'I declare and I promise you personally and in the name of my friars that I will always have the same loving care and special solicitude for you as for them.' But first, she went to the Benedictine nuns. Her father tried to remove her by force because he still wanted her to marry the man he had chosen. Clare and her sister Agnes then moved to the church of San Damiano, which Francis had rebuilt. Other women joined them, and the house became known for its radically austere lifestyle. The women were first known as the "Poor Ladies", then as the "Order of San Damiano."

San Damiano was the focal point of the new order. For a short time Francis himself directed it, but, in 1216, Clare became abbess. In 1263, ten years after her death, the order became known as the Order of Saint Clare, and later, the Poor Clares.

Unlike the friars, who moved around the country to preach, Clare and her sisters lived in enclosure, since an itinerant life-style was hardly conceivable at the time for women. Their life consisted of manual work and prayer. Later, she used to say, 'Love him [Jesus] totally who gave himself totally for love of you.'

Clare defended the order from attempts by clergy to impose a rule that resembled that of Saint Benedict more than that of Francis. Clare imitated Francis' way of life so much that she was sometimes entitled another Francis. She played a significant role in encouraging and helping Francis, whom she saw as a father figure, and she took care of him during his illnesses until his death.

After Francis' death, Clare continued to promote the order, writing to abbesses in other parts of Europe, and rejecting attempts by successive popes to impose a Rule which watered down the commitment to corporate poverty she had embraced. She did this until her death despite continuing poor health. Clare's Franciscan theology of joyous poverty in imitation of Christ is evident in the Rule she wrote for her community and in her four letters to Agnes of Prague. The friars did not understand Francis' idea of poverty; Clare may have been the only one who did. She wrote of it: -

O blessed poverty who bestows eternal riches on those who love and embrace her! O holy poverty, to those who possess and desire you, God promises the kingdom of heaven and offers eternal glory and blessed life! O God-centred poverty, whom the Lord Jesus Christ, who ruled and now rules heaven and earth, who spoke and things were made, condescended to embrace before all else!

On 9 August 1253, Pope Innocent IV by the letter *Solet annuere* confirmed that Clare's Rule - the first monastic rule known to have been written by a woman - would be the Rule for the Order of Poor Ladies. Two days later, on 11 August, Clare died at the age of fifty-nine. (Her sister, Saint Agnes of Assisi, died just sixteen days later.) Clare was canonized in 1255. In 1263, Pope Urban IV changed the name of the Order of Poor Ladies to the Order of Saint Clare.

In art, Clare is often shown carrying a monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament, in commemoration of the time in 1224 when she warded away the soldiers of Frederick II at the gates of the convent by displaying the Blessed Sacrament and kneeling in prayer.

In 1958, Pope Pius XII designated her patron saint of television, because of a tradition that when she was too ill to attend Mass, she had been able to see and hear it on the wall of her room.

Her most lasting legacy is a tradition of fidelity to prayer, penance and poverty on the part of her sisters.

*Counsels of Saint Clare*

‘Pray and watch at all times! Carry out steadfastly the work you have begun, and fulfil in poverty and humility the service you have undertaken. Do not be afraid! God who is faithful in all his words and holy in all his works will pour out his blessings upon you. He will be your help and best comforter, for he is our redeemer and our eternal reward.’

‘Place your mind before the mirror of eternity! Place your soul before the brilliance of glory! Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance! Transform your whole being into the image of the Godhead itself through contemplation, so that you too may feel what his friends feel as they taste the hidden sweetness which God himself has reserved from the beginning for those who love him.’

‘Among yourselves, let there be the same love with which Christ loved you.’

*Blessings of Saint Clare*

‘May the Lord show his mercy upon you,  
may the light of his presence be your guide,  
may he guard you and uphold you,  
may his Spirit be ever by your side.  
When you sleep, may his angels watch over you.  
When you wake, may he fill you with his grace.  
May you love him and serve him all of your days,  
and in heaven may you see his face. Amen’

‘Go without anxiety, for you have a good escort for your journey. Go, for he who created you has made you holy, and always protects you as a mother her child. He loves you with a tender love. May you be blessed, Lord, for you have created my soul. Amen.’

‘May the Lord be with us always, and, wherever we may be, may we be with him always.’

**SAINT JANE FRANCES FREMIOT de CHANTAL:**  
**12 August**

Jane Frances Fremiot was born in Dijon, France, on 28 January 1572. Her mother died when she was young, and she was brought up by her father, a politician of some local importance. As she grew, he gave her the responsibility of running the household. She came to be a capable and effective administrator. At the age of twenty-one, she married Baron Christophe de Chantal, and became the mother of six children, three of whom died shortly after birth. In addition, she managed one of his estates.

Then, at the age of twenty-eight, just after the birth of her youngest daughter, she was widowed when her husband was accidentally shot while hunting. Her father-in-law insisted that she come and live with him. She found him a difficult person, subject to moods and whims, which he expected her to accommodate. His housekeeper seems to have been an arrogant person who liked bossing Jane around. This lasted for seven years.

She met Saint Francis de Sales, the bishop of Geneva, when he preached at the Sainte Chapelle in Dijon, and he became her spiritual director. With his support, and having first settled the family business and arranged for the care and education of her children, she was inspired to start a new movement. At first she did not have a religious order in mind, but a congregation without external vows, where the cloister should be observed



only during the year of novitiate, after which the sisters should be free to go out by turns to visit the sick poor.

She admitted widows on condition that they were legitimately freed from the care of their children; the aged, provided they were of right mind; the crippled, provided they were sound in mind and heart; and even the sick, except those who had contagious diseases. When she was criticized for this, she replied, 'What do you want me to do? I like sick people; I'm on their side.' But she wanted members who were ready for work, saying, 'Hell is full of clever people, but heaven of workers.'

Jane Frances and Francis de Sales were close friends. In the lives of other saints, too, it is not uncommon to find friendship between a man and woman helping each other in their vocation. For example: Clare and Francis; Scholastica and her brother, Benedict; Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross; Monica and her son, Augustine; Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul, Mary Euphrasia Pelletier and John Eudes.

In Jane's lifetime, her Order, known as the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, grew to have eighty-six houses, but, although it had been founded to serve the sick and the poor in their homes, it was gradually diverted into becoming enclosed and contemplative.

Part of Jane's legacy is in her writings; she engaged in spiritual direction by letter. She wrote, 'Although we should fall fifty times a day, let us rise again quite

simply, without wasting thought in reflecting on what we should have done or left undone. Such useless discouragements are often greater faults than the ones that so disturb us.' And also, 'How delightful it is to see the servants of God gaining their livelihood by the labour of their hands, and having no other tomorrow than that of Divine Providence!'

She died on 13 December 1641 at the age of 69, and was buried in Annecy where she had worked for many years. She was canonized in 1767.

**SAINTS PONTIANUS and HIPPOLYTUS:  
13 August**

Very little is known of Pontianus except that he was the eighteenth bishop of Rome, from 21 July 230 until 28 September 235. He may have been a Roman whose father was Calpurnius. His pontificate was peaceful at first under the Emperor Severus Alexander. During this time, a synod was held in Rome, probably under his leadership, which approved the condemnation of Origen's writings by Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria, in 230.

Hippolytus was born about 170. During the pontificate of Pope Saint Callistus I, along with Tertullian, he created a schism, and became the first anti-pope. He objected to what he considered was too lenient an attitude towards those who had abandoned the faith in times of persecution but later wished to return. He wrote a great deal, in Greek, much of it as biblical commentary, but only fragments remain.

Here is a prayer of his: -

Eternal God, to whom the invisible is as clearly known as the visible, before you we bow down our heads, to you we submit our hard hearts and unruly bodies. Send down your blessing from heaven on (*Names*); hear them and answer their prayers. Confirm them with your strong hand and protect them from all evil. Preserve their bodies and souls,

increase their faith and reverence, and increase ours also, through your only Son, Jesus Christ.

And also a poem of his celebrating Easter: -

Joy to all creatures, honour, feasting and delight!  
Dark death is destroyed and life is everywhere  
restored.  
The gates of heaven are opened.  
God has shown himself human,  
and the human has gone up to God divine.  
The gates of hell God has shattered,  
the bars of Adam's prison broken.  
The people of the underworld have risen from the  
dead, bringing good news:  
what was promised was fulfilled.  
From the earth has come singing and dancing.

A new Roman emperor, Maximinus Thrax, had a different policy towards Christians from his predecessor, and he began a campaign of persecution. Pontianus and Hippolytus were arrested, and sent to work in mines in Sardinia, known then as "the island of death." So as not to leave the diocese of Rome without a bishop, Pontianus resigned his position on 28 September 235; he was the first bishop of Rome to do so. He died the following month; Hippolytus also died there in the same year.

The bodies of the two men were returned to Rome by Pope Saint Fabian one or two years later, and were re-interred in the cemetery of Saint Callistus on the Appian Way. Pontianus' tomb was re-discovered in 1909; it

bears the inscription, "Pontianus, Bishop;" the word "Martyr" was added later. Hippolytus was buried in a cemetery on the Via Tiburtina. The former pope and the former anti-pope are honoured together as saints since they shared together in suffering and dying for the faith.

## **SAINT MAXIMILIAN KOLBE: 14 August**

Raymond Kolbe was born in January 1894 in Zdunska Wola, in a part of Poland then under Russian rule. His father, Julius, was an ethnic German, while his mother was Polish. He had four brothers, of whom two died as children. His mother worked as a midwife, and owned a shop in part of her rented house which sold groceries and household goods, and she took in lodgers. Julius Kolbe worked at a mill, and also on rented land where he grew vegetables. In 1914, when the First World War broke out, Julius joined Piłsudski's Polish Legions, was captured by the Russians, and hanged for fighting for the independence of his country.

Raymond's life was strongly influenced by a childhood vision of the Virgin Mary that he later described: 'I asked the Mother of God what was to become of me. She came to me holding two crowns, one white, the other red. She asked me if I was willing to accept either of these crowns. The white one meant that I should persevere in purity, and the red that I should become a martyr. I said that I would accept them both.'

In 1907, Raymond and his older brother Francis illegally crossed the border from Russian- to Austro-Hungarian controlled Poland so as to join the Conventual Franciscans. In 1910, Raymond entered the novitiate and was given the names Maximilian Maria. An exceptional student, he was sent to Rome, where, in 1915, he gained

a PhD at the age of twenty-one, was ordained at twenty-four, and gained a doctorate in theology at twenty-five.

While in Rome, he witnessed demonstrations against the popes by Freemasons. This inspired him to organize the *Militia Immaculata*, or Army of Mary, to work for the conversion of sinners and those hostile to the church, especially Masons. The *Militia* was controversial, as it was sometimes too militant, even violent.

While still a student, he engaged in the apostolate of publishing, in the days before TV, and when radios were rare. People were ignorant of the faith, so he and his confrères used modern printing and administrative techniques to publish catechetical and devotional tracts, a daily newspaper with a circulation of 230,000 and a monthly magazine with a circulation of a million. (He later used radio to spread the faith, and to speak out against the crimes of the Nazi regime.) He is the only canonized saint to have held an amateur radio license.

In 1919, he returned to the newly independent Poland, where he promoted devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. In 1927, he founded a friary at Niepokalanów near Warsaw, a seminary, a radio station, and produced publications. That work continues there to the present day. He also founded an order, the Franciscan Friars of Mary Immaculate, whose *Rule* is influenced by his spirituality.

He left Poland for Japan in 1930, spending six years there. He founded a friary near Nagasaki, a newspaper

and a seminary. Locals advised him that the site was inauspicious, and that he should build on the other side of the mountain. But he went ahead and did it his way. After his death, when Nagasaki was atom-bombed in 1945, the houses on the “auspicious” side of the mountain were damaged, while the mountain shielded the friary from the blast.

In his absence, the friary at Niepokalanów began to publish a daily newspaper, which became Poland's top-seller. Maximilian was accused of anti-Semitism based on the content of the newspaper, which allegedly included claims of a Zionist plot for world domination. But he sheltered Jewish refugees during the war, saying, ‘All people are brothers.’

He returned to Poland before its invasion by Germany and the Soviet Union in September 1939. Maximilian provided shelter to refugees, including 2,000 Jews whom he hid in the friary in Niepokalanów. Anyone with a third level education was sent to a camp to be killed, because the Nazis wanted the country to be a slave state without an educated local leadership. In February 1941, he was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in Auschwitz. One day, it appeared that a prisoner had escaped, though in fact his body was later found in a latrine. In order to deter escapes, camp policy was to kill ten prisoners for every one who escaped. Ten men were selected to be starved to death in an underground bunker. When one of them began crying for his wife and children, Maximilian approached a German officer - itself a courageous action as prisoners were forbidden to



speak to a guard unless spoken to, with severe punishment for those who disobeyed - and offered to take his place. His offer was accepted.

In the starvation cell, he celebrated Mass each day and led the men in song and prayer, encouraging them, saying they would soon be in heaven. He gave a sermon on the relationship between the Assumption of Mary and the Trinity. Perhaps such a vision of beauty, something of eternity, was what the men needed in that hell-hole of cruelty, hatred and evil.

Each time the guards checked, Maximilian was standing or kneeling in the middle of the cell, looking calmly at those who entered. After two weeks of dehydration and starvation, only he remained alive. The guards wanted the bunker emptied so they injected carbolic acid into his heart. His remains were cremated the next day, 15 August, the feast of the Assumption of Mary. He was forty-seven.

Maximilian was beatified in 1971 as a confessor by Pope Paul VI, who described him as a 'martyr to charity.' But, in 1982, Pope John Paul II canonized him as a martyr. Present on the occasion was the man whose life he had saved by taking his place in the starvation cell.

He is the patron saint of drug addicts, political prisoners, families, journalists, and pro-life activists. Pope John Paul II declared him 'the Patron Saint of our difficult [twentieth] Century.'

## **SAINT STEPHEN of HUNGARY: 16 August**

Stephen was born about 968 with the name of *Vajk* in the town of Esztergom in Hungary to parents of royal blood. It is said that he was baptized in 985 by Saint Adalbert of Prague with the name Stephen (István), to honour Saint Stephen, the first martyr. The name Stephen means *crown* in Greek, and *law* in Hebrew. Biographers saw this as indicating that, as king, he would give Hungary law.

At the age of twenty-seven, he married Giselle of Bavaria, who brought him German support.

When Stephen reached adolescence, an assembly of nobles decided that he would follow his father as ruler of the Hungarians. However, this decision contradicted the tribal custom that gave succession to the eldest close relative of the deceased ruler. In 997, his father died, and a succession struggle followed. Stephen claimed to rule the Magyars by the principle of Christian divine right, while his uncle, Koppány, a powerful pagan chieftain, claimed the traditional right. Eventually, the two met in battle near Veszprém. Stephen, victorious, assumed the title of Grand Prince of the Hungarians. Stephen's victory came about mainly because of German support, and the battle was seen by many as a struggle between Germans and Magyars. Not everyone accepted his rule.

According to Hungarian tradition, Pope Silvester II, with the consent of Otto III, Holy Roman Emperor, sent

a magnificent jewelled gold crown, known as the Holy Crown, to Stephen along with a letter recognizing him as Christian king of Hungary. Later, this tradition was interpreted as papal recognition of the independence of Hungary from the Holy Roman Empire. The date of the coronation of Stephen I is variously given as Christmas Day 1000, or 1 January 1001. Stephen is regarded as the founder of the Hungarian nation.

Not long after, he set up six dioceses, including the archdiocese of Esztergom; this was to establish the independence of the church in Hungary from German control. In his first decree as king, he ordered each ten villages to build a church, and he invited foreign priests to evangelize his kingdom. He also re-organized the civil administration. He expanded his kingdom through wars against Poland, Bulgaria, Russia, Germany and local rulers. (There used to be a petition in the Litany of the Saints: ‘*A sagittis Ungarorum, libera nos, Domine,*’ ‘From the arrows of the Hungarians, deliver us, O Lord.’) Stephen consolidated his kingdom through the foundation of more dioceses.

It could be said that Stephen entered into two marriages of convenience: one with Giselle, his wife, to gain German support; the other, with the church, to gain its support. The latter was a symbiotic relationship: they used each other, with the ambiguities and compromises that this entailed for both.

As he grew older, Stephen’s intention was to retire to a life of contemplation and hand over the kingdom to his

son Emeric. But Emeric died in 1031 of injuries received in a hunting accident. Stephen mourned for a long time and the death took a great toll on his health. He eventually recovered, but never regained his original vitality. Having no children left, he could not find anyone among his remaining relatives who was able to rule the country competently and be willing to maintain the Christian faith of the nation. He did not want to entrust his kingdom to his cousin, Duke Vazul, whom he suspected of following pagan customs. The duke conspired to kill Stephen, but the assassination attempt failed. In punishment, Vazul's eyes were gouged out and molten lead was poured into his ears.

Without an heir, on his deathbed, Stephen prayed to the Blessed Virgin Mary, asking her to take the Hungarian people as her subjects and become their queen. He died on the feast of the Assumption 1038 at Székesfehérvár, where he was buried. Nine years of civil strife followed, until Andrew I was crowned in 1047.

Along with his son, Emeric, Stephen was canonized by Pope Gregory VII in 1083. He became the first canonized confessor king. During the period of communist rule in Hungary, Saint Stephen's day became the anniversary of the Stalinist constitution of 1949 and "*The celebration of new bread — the end of the harvest.*"

The present crown of Saint Stephen is of later origin than that sent by Pope Silvester II. It was removed from Hungary in 1945 for safekeeping, and entrusted to the United States government. It was kept in a vault in Fort

Knox until 1978, when it was returned to Hungary by order of President Jimmy Carter. It has been enshrined in the Hungarian parliament building in Budapest since 2000.

The following is an extract from an admonition of Stephen's to Emeric: -

My dearest son, if you desire to honour the royal crown, I advise, I counsel, I urge you above all things to maintain the Catholic and Apostolic faith with such diligence and care that you may be an example to all those placed under you by God, and that the clergy may rightly call you a man of true Christian profession.

My beloved son, delight of my heart, hope of our posterity, I pray, I command, that at every time and in everything, strengthened by your devotion to me, you may show favour not only to relations and kin, or to the most eminent, be they leaders or rich men or neighbours or fellow-countrymen, but also to foreigners and to all who come to you. By fulfilling your duty in this way you will reach the highest state of happiness. Be merciful to all who are suffering violence, keeping always in your heart the example of the Lord who said: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' Be patient with everyone, not only with the powerful, but also with the weak.

Finally, be strong lest prosperity lift you up too much or adversity cast you down. Be humble in this

life that God may raise you up in the next. Be truly moderate and do not punish or condemn anyone immoderately. Be gentle so that you may never oppose justice. Be honourable so that you never voluntarily bring disgrace upon anyone. Be chaste so that you may avoid all the foulness that so resembles the pangs of death.

All these virtues I have noted above make up the royal crown and without them no one is fit to rule here on earth or attain to the heavenly Kingdom.

(See the Note on the Just Ruler)

## **SAINT JOHN EUDES: 19 August**

John Eudes was born at Ri, in France, on 14 November 1601. At the age of fourteen, he took a vow of chastity. He studied with the Jesuits at Caen, and then joined the Congregation of the Oratory in 1623. He was guided by Pierre de Bérulle, a widely respected spiritual mentor. In December 1625, he was ordained priest, and his first work was among victims of a plague which had wrought havoc across France.

He preached parish missions all over France, but especially in Normandy. He was called by Jean-Jacques Olier ‘the prodigy of his time.’

In 1641, he founded the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge, to provide a refuge for prostitutes who wished to reform. This society was approved by Pope Alexander VII in 1666, and influenced Saint Mary Euphrasia Pelletier to establish the Good Shepherd Sisters.

Cardinal Richelieu encouraged John to leave the Congregation of the Oratory and establish the new Congregation of Jesus and Mary, for missionary work and the education of priests. Beginning at Caen in 1643, they became known as the Eudists.

He promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, these becoming liturgical celebrations in 1672 and 1648 respectively. He prepared

the liturgical texts for the Mass and Office of those celebrations. On the link between them, he wrote,

We must never separate what God has so perfectly united. So closely are Jesus and Mary bound up with each other that whoever beholds Jesus sees Mary; whoever loves Jesus, loves Mary; whoever has devotion to Jesus, has devotion to Mary. (*The Kingdom of Jesus*, Part Six, Chapter XI)

His spiritual life was Christ-centred: -

Since the Sacred Heart of Jesus is God's love symbolically (though by no means merely metaphorically, figuratively or arbitrarily) expressed, all those acts which belong to strictly divine worship have first place in this devotion. For God himself is its object.

To encourage people to persevere in prayer, he said, 'You can advance further in grace in one hour during a time of affliction than in many days in a time of consolation.'

He also said,

I see an infinite number of crucified persons in the world, but few who are crucified by the love of Jesus. Some are crucified by their self-love and by an inordinate love of the world, but happy are they who are crucified for the love of Jesus; happy are they who live and die on the cross with Jesus.



And, 'The Christian has a union with Jesus Christ more noble, more intimate and more perfect than the members of a human body have with their head.'

John wrote five substantial works of theology, including the first on devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. He died at Caen on 19 August 1680, and was canonized in 1925.

## **SAINT BERNARD of CLAIRVAUX: 20 August**

Bernard was born about 1090 to an aristocratic family in Burgundy, France. At the age of nine, he began school; he had a flair for literature, especially poetry. He wanted to excel in literature in order to take up the study of the Bible.

After the death of his mother, Bernard, a highly charismatic man, brought thirty other young noblemen of Burgundy with him in 1111 seeking admission to the Cistercian order at Cîteaux. This was a small community of reformed Benedictines which would have great influence on Western monasticism. Three years later, he was sent to found a new abbey in a place called Clear Valley, or, Clairvaux. The beginnings of Clairvaux abbey were difficult, the regime being so austere that Bernard became ill. Only the influence of a friend and the authority of the general chapter could make him mitigate its austerity. The monastery, however, made rapid progress. Disciples flocked to it in great numbers, and put themselves under his direction. Even his father and all his brothers joined it.

In 1119, Bernard was present at the first general chapter of the order. Though still only in his twenties, he was listened to with great respect, especially when he spoke on the spiritual renewal of religious orders.

In 1120, Bernard began writing, first, on the monastic life, and then a series of homilies on Mary, the mother of

Jesus, and works on the office of bishop, on grace and free will and on the love of God.

His writings made him enemies as well as friends. He was accused of meddling in others' affairs. On behalf of the pope, a cardinal wrote Bernard a sharp letter, stating, 'It is not right that noisy and troublesome frogs should come out of their marshes to trouble the Holy See and the cardinals.' Bernard replied, saying that, if he had assisted at the council (Lateran I in 1123), it was because he had been dragged to it by force. He went on,

If you so wished, who would have been more capable of freeing me from the necessity of assisting at the council than yourself? Forbid those noisy, troublesome frogs to come out of their holes, to leave their marshes.... Then your friend will no longer be exposed to the accusation of pride and presumption.

In contrast to the rational approach to an understanding of God that the Scholastics adopted, Bernard's focussed on the person of Christ. He had a special devotion to the Virgin Mary, and wrote several works about her, although he argued against the doctrine of her Immaculate Conception. One of his best-known writings was a book called *On how to love God*.

On the death of Pope Honorius II, in 1130, a schism broke out between two rival claimants to the papacy, Anacletus II and Innocent II. Bernard supported Innocent II and travelled widely for about seven years winning

support for him. When Anacletus died, the schism ended with him.

Bernard spent a great deal of time travelling, usually in peace-making between rulers, and in working for unity within the church. He devoted himself with renewed vigour to writing, and at this time wrote sermons on the Song of Songs.

In 1139, Bernard assisted at the second Lateran Council, in which the surviving adherents of the schism were condemned. He was involved in a lengthy and often acrimonious controversy with Peter Abelard. It ended with Peter being condemned in 1141, and his death two years later.

At about this time, Bernard was visited at Clairvaux by Saint Malachy, the archbishop of Armagh in Ireland, and a close friendship formed between them. Malachy wanted to become a Cistercian, but the pope would not give his permission. Malachy died at Clairvaux in 1148.

One of Bernard's followers was elected pope as Eugene III in 1141. At the new pope's request, Bernard sent him a text called the *Book of Considerations*, the main idea of which is that reform in the church should begin with the sanctity of the pope, and that prayer, silence and meditation should precede action. He preached a retreat at the papal court and some of his notes survive. He wrote,

All I hear in your palace every day is talk of law and more law. And what laws but those of Emperor Justinian! I hear nothing of the law of love. You spend most of your time on matters of politics. In your palace you are surrounded by flatterers, liars and adulterers – all looking for favours. Save your valuable time for meditating on the Gospel, and preach it joyously. (Cited by Donald B. Cozzens, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*, p.94)

During this time, Bernard's monastic foundations flourished, and he sent groups of monks abroad, leading to the foundation of 163 monasteries in different parts of Europe. At his death, they numbered 343, from Norway to Lebanon, and from Ireland to Sicily.

In 1145, Bernard travelled in southern France, preaching against heresy. His preaching, aided by his ascetic looks and simple attire, helped win people over. In a letter written in 1146, Bernard called upon people to extirpate the last remnants of heresy. He also preached against the Cathars.

His influence led Pope Alexander III to launch reforms that would lead to the enhancement of the role of canon law. He was harsh towards Jews, yet he intervened on their behalf when they were being persecuted in the Rhineland.

Following the defeat of the Christian army by the Seljuk Turks at the siege of Edessa, the pope commissioned Bernard to preach a new crusade. There

was at first no popular enthusiasm for the crusade as there had been for the first in 1095. Bernard preached on the taking of the cross as a means of gaining grace and absolution from sin. His preaching was so effective that he could write to the pope, 'Cities and castles are now empty. There is not left one man to seven women, and everywhere there are widows to still-living husbands.' But, as in the first Crusade, the preaching led to widespread attacks on Jews throughout Germany, because they failed to contribute financially to the crusade. The archbishops of Cologne and of Mainz opposed these attacks and asked Bernard to denounce them. He did so, and eventually brought them to an end. In promoting this crusade, he said, controversially, 'The knight of Christ can deal out death in all security. If he dies, it is for his own good; if he kills, it is for Christ.'

In the last years of Bernard's life, the second Crusade failed, and responsibility for this was thrown on him. He considered it his duty to apologize to the pope, and this is inserted in his *Book of Considerations*: he said that the failure of the crusades was caused by the sins of the crusaders. When his attempt to call a new crusade failed, he tried to disassociate himself altogether from the fiasco of the second Crusade.

Luther quoted Bernard as supporting justification by faith alone, while Calvin quoted him as supporting the idea of imputed righteousness.

Bernard was instrumental in re-emphasizing the importance of *Lectio Divina* and contemplation on

scripture. He considered them as keys to nourishing Christian spirituality.

Bernard could have a sharp tongue, and a sharper pen. When a nun asked him for advice, saying she had been thinking of leaving the convent, he said,

You are either one of the wise virgins or one of the foolish ones [see Matthew 25.1-13] – that is, if indeed you still are a virgin. If you are one of the wise virgins, your convent needs you. If you are one of the foolish ones, you need your convent. In either case, stay where you are.

And when Peter Abelard, Bernard's long-time intellectual rival was castrated in a row over an affair he had with Heloïse, a niece of the cathedral canon who arranged the mutilation, Bernard wrote to him, beginning,

‘Dear...’ – Sorry, I do not know how to address you. I cannot call you Sir, since you are no longer a man. And I cannot call you Madame since you are not yet a woman. So how should I address you? Please advise me.’

He also wrote that, ‘There are two things which defile and ruin [male] religious: daintiness in food and familiarity with women.’

But he also had better things to say: -

‘If you are wise, be a reservoir, not a pipe. A pipe delivers the water it has received, but a reservoir waits until it is full to over-flowing, and then, without loss to itself, shares its superabundance of water. Be full yourself of what you preach, and do not think it enough to pour it out for others.’ (*In Cant.*, Sermon 18)

‘If people are at peace in their conscience, they need not care to shine with the praise of others.’

‘First learn to love yourself, and then you can love God.’

‘God can never be sought in vain – even when he cannot be found.’

‘If you notice something evil in yourself, correct it; if something good, nurture it; if something beautiful, cherish it; if something sound, preserve it; if something unhealthy, heal it. Do not weary of reading the commandments of the Lord, and you will be adequately instructed by them so as to know what to avoid and what to seek.’

‘If there should ever be a monastery without an awkward or ill-tempered member, it would be necessary to go and find one and pay him his weight in gold, so great is the benefit that results from this trial, when it is used properly.’

‘The road pointed out to you is not a long one; you do not have to cross the seas or pierce the clouds or climb



mountains to meet your God. Enter into your own soul and you will find him, for his word is near you; it is on your lips and in your heart. Go down deep into your heart.’ (Sermon 1 On the coming of the Lord, 9-10; *Opera Omnia* (1966), 4.167-169)

The *Memorare*, a well-known prayer to Mary, is attributed to him: -

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help, or sought your intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto you, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother. To you do I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word incarnate, despise not my petition, but, in your clemency, hear and answer me. Amen.

Where there is bright light, there is also deep shadow. Bernard died on 20 August 1153 at the age of sixty-three. He was canonized in 1174, and named doctor of the church in 1830. Pope Pius XII called him ‘the last of the Fathers.’

## **POPE SAINT PIUS X: 21 August**

Joseph Melchior Sarto was born in Riese, Italy, in 1835, one of ten children. His father was a postman, his mother a housewife. Joseph used to walk six kilometres to school each day. He entered a seminary in Padua, and was ordained priest in 1858 for the diocese of Treviso.

He taught theology in a seminary from 1880 to 1884, became bishop of Mantua in 1884, cardinal in 1893, and then Patriarch of Venice. In Venice he gave much time to social works and parochial banks. In his first pastoral letter, he wrote that in matters pertaining to the pope, ‘There should be no questions, no subtleties, no opposing of personal rights to his rights, but only obedience.’

Pope Leo XIII died in 1903. In the conclave which followed, Cardinal Rampolla, the secretary of state, received most votes in the first two ballots, but then a Polish cardinal announced that the Austrian emperor was exercising his claimed right to veto him. A few days later, Joseph Sarto received a large majority of votes. It has been said that he declined the election, feeling unworthy. Also, he had been angered by the Austrian veto and vowed to rescind it and excommunicate anyone who announced such a veto in a conclave. After a period of prayer, he accepted the election and chose the name of Pius X. He said that the aim of his pontificate was to restore all things in Christ. He was the first pope in centuries to have come from a background in parish

work, and that coloured his papacy from beginning to end.

One particular concern he had was how to educate in the faith urban youth who did not have the opportunity of attending Catholic schools. As pope, he gave weekly catechism lessons in the Vatican to children, and preached every Sunday. In 1905, he required the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine to be set up in every parish to reclaim children from religious ignorance.

Pius produced a *Catechism*, which offered a simple, popular text, but it was not prescribed for the whole church. Among other things, it reiterated the existence of Limbo, saying that the unbaptized ‘do not have the joy of God but neither do they suffer... they do not deserve Paradise, but neither do they deserve Hell or Purgatory.’

He promoted the use of Gregorian chant in the liturgy, and revised the breviary, the official prayer-book of priests and religious, but banned women from church choirs. Addressing the bishops of Italy on 29 July 1904, he said,

In public meetings, never allow women to speak, however respectable or pious they may seem. If, on a specific occasion, bishops consider it opportune to permit a meeting of women by themselves, these may speak but only under the presidency and supervision of high ecclesiastical personalities.

Pius promoted frequent and even daily communion for all Catholics, despite criticism that this would encourage irreverence. He wrote,

Frequent and daily Communion, as a thing most earnestly desired by Christ our Lord, and by the Catholic Church, should be open to all the faithful, of whatever rank and condition of life, so that no one who is in the state of grace, and who approaches the Holy Table with a right and devout intention, can lawfully be hindered therefrom. (Decree on Frequent and Early Communion, Congregation of the Council, 20 December 1905, n.1)

He used to say, 'Holy Communion is the shortest and safest way to Heaven.' This extended to children who had reached the "use of reason," which he reduced from twelve years to seven. There was opposition to this on the grounds that, once children had made first Communion, their parents might withdraw them from Catholic schools. He also promoted the sacrament of penance so that Communion would be made worthily.

On the church, he wrote, that it: -

is essentially an unequal society comprising two categories of persons, the pastors and the flock . . . Since the pastors alone possess authority, the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the pastors. (*Vehementer Nos*, 1906, n.8)

His immediate predecessor, Leo XIII, had promoted a rapprochement between Christianity and secular culture, faith and science, divine revelation and reason. He had sought to revive the inheritance of Thomas Aquinas, ‘the marriage of reason and revelation,’ as a response to secular thought. Pius’ papacy featured condemnation of those he termed “modernists” and “relativists,” and the advancement of those called “integralists.” Modernists argued that beliefs of the church have evolved throughout its history and need to continue to do so, while their opponents viewed this as compromising essentials of faith.

In the decree *Lamentabili Sane* issued in 1907, Pius condemned sixty-five modernist propositions. Here are some extracts: -

Progress of dogmas... is, in reality, nothing but the corruption of dogmas. (Introduction)

The organic constitution of the Church is not immutable. Like human society, Christian society is subject to a perpetual evolution. (Proposition 53 - condemned)

This was followed in 1910 by the encyclical letter *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, which characterized modernism as the ‘synthesis of all heresies.’ The following are quotes from it: -

Their [the Modernists] principal doctrine, namely, evolution. (n.26)

... that most pernicious doctrine which would make of the laity the factor of progress in the Church. (n.27)

The remote causes [of Modernism] may be reduced to two: curiosity and pride. (n.40)

There is no surer sign that a man is tending to Modernism than when he begins to show his dislike for the scholastic method. (n.42)

In support, Pius quoted Pope Gregory XVI as speaking of 'the Catholic Church wherein truth is found without the slightest shadow of error.' (Pope Gregory XVI, Encyclical *Singulari Nos*, 25 June 1834, n.40)

It is not enough to hinder the reading and the sale of bad books - it is also necessary to prevent them from being published.... We have the highest esteem for this institution of censors, and we not only exhort, but we order that it be extended to all dioceses. (n.52)

The historian Eamon Duffy writes of this: -

The trouble lay in the indiscriminating character of the condemnation, its unfocused severity and paranoia.... Great scholars were sacked, compliant nonentities promoted. No one was safe, and distinguished bishops, even curial cardinals, found their every action and word watched and reported.

The encyclical was simply the opening shot in what rapidly became nothing less than a reign of terror. The Pope's denunciation not merely of ideas but of motives unleashed a flood of suspicion and reprisal. Liberal Catholic newspapers and periodicals were suppressed; seminary teachers and academics suspected of flirting with new ideas were disgraced and dismissed from their posts. A secret organization designed to winkle out theological deviants, the *Sodalitium Pianum* (Sodality of St. Pius V), led by Monsignor Umberto Benigni, was personally encouraged by the Pope. It lied to, spied upon, and harassed suspect theologians. Personal letters were opened and photographed, clerical *agents provocateurs* lured unwary liberals into incriminating themselves and... over-zealous seminary professors even denounced their students for heresy, on the basis of essays written in class. (Eamon Duffy, *Faith of our Fathers*, Continuum, London, 2004, pp.250-251)

Among those so accused were Pius' immediate successor, Pope Benedict XV and the future Pope John XXIII.

Speaking of those who counselled gentleness instead of harshness, Pius said, 'They want them to be treated with oil, soap and kisses. But they should be beaten with fists. In a duel, you don't count or measure the blows, you strike as you can.' He was passionately committed

to the Sodalitium's campaign, funded it, and heaped praise and promotions on Benigni. (The latter was also a notorious anti-Semite who once wrote about 'that worthy rabbinical race that still today in 1891 slits the throats of little Christians for the Synagogue's Passover.')

Pius ordered clerics to take an oath against modernism; it remained in force until the 1960's. 'The "Anti-Modernist Oath" shattered public confidence in the integrity and freedom of Catholic academic standards.' It created 'a stifling ethos of unjust and suspicious hyper-orthodoxy.' 'Catholic biblical studies withered, shackled to absurd and demonstrably false claims like the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.... Catholic philosophers and theologians were forced into silence or token parroting of the party line. Obedience, not enquiry, became the badge of Catholic thought. It was to be a generation before anything approaching an honest intellectual life was possible for Catholic theologians.' (Above quotes from Duffy, *op. cit.*, p.251)

He authorized the compilation of a code of canon law, which would gather into one text the many laws and decrees of previous centuries. This was published in 1917, after his death, and remained in force until 1983. Surprisingly, especially in view of Pius' conservative views, the code, in its 2414 canons, contained not a single reference to God, Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. He established regional seminaries in Italy and promulgated a new plan of seminary study.



Pius X reversed the accommodating approach of Leo XIII towards secular governments. He saw democratic movements as heirs to the tradition of the French Revolution: -

‘If the people hold power, what becomes of authority? It becomes a shadow, a myth; there is no longer a law properly so called, there is no longer obedience.’ (Letter to the Bishops of France on “Some Errors respecting the Rights of Democracy,” 25 August 1910)

He refused to receive a French president who visited the king of Italy, because the visit implied acceptance by France of Italy’s annexation of the Papal States. This refusal led to the passage in 1905 of a law separating church and state in France. Pius denounced the law, and removed two bishops for recognising the French Republic. (The French bishops did not recognize France as a republic until 1946.) France replied by expelling the Jesuits and breaking off diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Pius’ actions and statements against international relations with Italy angered many countries, both Catholic and non-Catholic. At first, he maintained decrees prohibiting Italian Catholics from voting, later modifying these, as long as they did not vote for socialists. He never recognised the Italian government, and opposed trade unions that were not exclusively Catholic. In 1910, he refused to receive in audience the American Vice-President and a former U.S. president because they had addressed a Methodist conference in Rome. In Ireland, Protestants worried that *Home Rule* in

an Ireland run by Catholics inspired by Pius X would result in what they called *Rome Rule*.

In 1908, the decree *Ne Temere* (*Lest rashly*) provided that marriages not performed by a Catholic priest were sacramentally invalid, and that in mixed marriages undertakings should be given that children of the marriage would be brought up as Catholics. This caused friction with Protestants and was particularly divisive in Ireland, contributing indirectly to subsequent political conflict here. In later years, a request by an Irish government that the decree be modified was rejected.

Pius tried to win freedom for the Catholic Church in the part of Poland under Russian rule, but his efforts came to nothing, because, although imperial decrees granting freedom were published, the Russian Orthodox Church insisted on rigorous interpretations that negated them in practice.

In 1913, Pius suffered a heart attack, and thereafter was in poor health. He became ill again in August 1914, his condition worsened by the outbreak of World War I. He died on 20 August 1914 of another heart attack.

Pius X became the first pope to be canonized since Pius V in 1712. Pope Pius XII declared him Blessed in 1951, speaking of him as the "Pope of the Eucharist," and canonized him in 1954. Some saw this as the canonization not simply of a pope but of a policy of reaction.

Pius encouraged personal piety and a lifestyle reflecting Christian values. He used to say, 'Hope is the sole companion of my life, the greatest support in uncertainty, the strongest power in situations of weakness.' He lived a simple life, saying, 'I was born poor, I have lived poor, and I wish to die poor.'

## **SAINT ROSE of LIMA: 23 August**

Rose was born Isabel Flores y de Olivia in 1586 in Lima, Peru, then part of Spain's American empire. She was one of many children of Gaspar Flores, a Spaniard, and María de Olivia, a native of Lima. When she was confirmed by the archbishop of Lima, Saint Turibius of Mongrovejo, she was given the name of Rose.

She admired and closely imitated the Dominican tertiary (Third Order member), Saint Catherine of Siena. When still a young girl, she fasted three times a week, abstained from meat, and performed other penances in secret. She cut off her hair and rubbed pepper on her face to discourage young men who were attracted to her. She rejected all offers and arrangements of marriage. She received Holy Communion daily, an exceptional practice at the time, and prayed for hours in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

Rose helped feed the hungry of her neighbourhood. She grew flowers, made lace and embroidery, and sold these in the market to help her family and the poor. When her mother reproached her for helping the poor and the sick at home, she replied, 'When we serve the poor and the sick, we serve Jesus. We must not fail to help our neighbours, because in them we serve Jesus.' Gradually, she became a recluse, spending much time in prayer and penance in her room, leaving home only to go to the church. She experienced emptiness in prayer and desolation of spirit. Regarding this, she used to say: -

Our Lord and Saviour lifted up his voice and said with incomparable majesty, 'Let all people know that grace comes after tribulation. Let them know that without the burden of afflictions it is impossible to reach the height of grace. Let them know that the gifts of grace increase as the struggles increase.'

Rose was brought before the Inquisition to be questioned but was cleared. It found that her activities were the work of grace.

She wished to enter the Dominican nuns, but her father would not allow it, so, at the age of twenty, she entered the Dominican Third Order, a lay organization following the ideals of Saint Dominic. Against her parents' wishes, she took a vow of perpetual virginity. She also wore a heavy silver crown on her head, with spikes on the inside, in imitation of Jesus' crown of thorns. (See John 19.2) She used to say, 'Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.' Rose continued this form of life for eleven years, until her death on 24 August 1617, at the age of thirty-one. It was said that she knew its date in advance.

Rose had a great reputation for holiness, and her funeral drew an immense crowd, while the archbishop preached at it. She was canonized in 1671, the first person in the Americas to be so honoured. Her shrine, along with that of Saints Martin de Porres and John Macías, is in the Dominican convent in Lima. Many reports of miracles and cures followed her death, and several towns are named after her. She is patroness of

the indigenous peoples of the Americas, of the Philippines, of gardeners, florists, people misunderstood for their piety, and for the resolution of family quarrels.

## SAINT BARTHOLOMEW: 24 August

Bartholomew is listed among the twelve apostles of Jesus in Matthew 10.1-4, Mark 3.13-19, and Luke 6.12-16. He also appears as one of the witnesses of the Ascension in Acts 1.4, 12, 13. Each time he is named in the company of Philip. He is not mentioned in John, but the Nathaniel given there is regarded by some scholars as the same person, while others identify Nathaniel with Matthias.

In John's Gospel (1.43-51), Nathanael is introduced as a friend of Philip and, in John 21.2, as being from 'Cana in Galilee.' He is described as initially being skeptical about the Messiah coming from Nazareth, saying, 'Can anything good come from that place?' (John 1.45) but nonetheless he follows Philip's invitation. He recognizes Jesus as 'the Son of God' and 'the King of Israel.' In John 21.2, he is one of the disciples to whom Jesus appeared after the Resurrection.

Apart from the Gospels, little is reliably known about Bartholomew. The fourth century historian, Eusebius, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, V.10.3, quotes a man called Pantaenus as saying that there were traces of Bartholomew's presence in India. Along with the apostle Jude, he is also said to have brought the Christian faith to Armenia in the first century. Bartholomew and Jude are patrons of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and the latter's claim to apostolic origin is used to fend off claims of oversight or supremacy by the Ecumenical

Patriarchate in Constantinople. Armenian tradition holds that Bartholomew converted the king, but the king's brother then ordered his execution. According to one account, he was beheaded, but another holds that he was skinned alive and then crucified upside down. The account of his being skinned alive is popular, being represented in many works of art. In Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, he is shown with a large knife, holding his own skin.

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* states that he went to India, and left there a copy of Matthew's Gospel. Other traditions record him as preaching in Ethiopia, Turkey, Iraq, or Iran. However, it seems that in reality there is little dependable early information about him.

Bartholomew was honest, with a wry sense of humour; Jesus described him as 'a man in whom there is no guile.' (John 1.47) He made a great leap of faith. (John 1.48-51)



## **SAINT LOUIS IX of FRANCE: 25 August**

Louis was born in 1214, near Paris, the son of Prince Louis VIII and Blanche of Castile. His father died when he was only twelve years old; within a month, he was crowned Louis IX at Reims cathedral. His mother was regent during his minority. He began to rule in his own right when he was about twenty, but his mother remained his counsellor until her death eighteen years later. Louis married Margaret of Provence in 1234, when he was twenty; they had eleven children.

When he was fifteen, Louis' mother brought an end to the Albigensian Crusade, after signing an agreement that cleared their leader of a charge of murdering a preacher sent to convert them. Louis went on the seventh and eighth crusades, in 1248 and 1270. To finance his first crusade, Louis ordered the expulsion of all Jews engaged in banking, the confiscation of their property, and, for good measure, burned 20,000 copies of the *Talmud*.

He began his crusade by capturing Damietta in Egypt in 1249. But the Egyptians rallied under the leadership of a queen, and, in 1250, Louis not only lost his army in battle but was captured. His release was negotiated for a ransom of 400,000 *livres*, (about one-third of France's annual revenue), and the surrender of Damietta.

He spent four years in the Crusader kingdoms of Palestine, helping Crusaders rebuild their defences and negotiating with Mongol kings to try to create an

alliance against the Saracens, but this came to nothing. The crusades, too, ended in defeat.

Louis' patronage of the arts was more successful than his military or diplomatic adventures, with the French style in art and architecture being copied by other kings. He worked with the parliament to improve the legal system, and founded the Sorbonne University.

During the so-called "Golden Century of Saint Louis", France was at its height, politically and economically. The king of France was regarded as a *first among equals* among Europe's rulers. He ruled the largest and wealthiest kingdom, one which was the centre of arts and intellectual thought at the time. The respect felt for Louis was due mainly, it seems, to the attractiveness of his personality. He was seen as the embodiment of the idea of Christendom. His reputation for justice was widely known, and he was often chosen as arbiter in quarrels among European rulers.

Louis was a devout Catholic, and took seriously his mission as "Lieutenant [French: lieu, place; tenant, taking] of God on Earth", a title bestowed on him at his coronation. He acquired relics at vast cost, and built churches. At the urging of Pope Gregory IX, he ordered the burning in 1243 of some 12,000 manuscript copies of the Talmud and other Jewish books. Legislation against the Talmud resulted from concerns that its circulation would weaken Christians' faith and threaten the Christian basis of society, the preservation of which was the monarch's duty. Louis also expanded the work of the

Inquisition, mostly in southern France where the Cathar heresy had been strongest. He confiscated Cathar property to finance his crusade.

Louis used to sign his name on official documents as 'Louis of Boissy' after the insignificant town where he had been baptized. Asked why he did this rather than use Louis of France, he said that when he died his kingship would come to an end, but his membership in the Kingdom of Heaven would continue, and that began with his baptism. So he chose the more lasting kingdom.

In Louis' time, France was known as "the eldest daughter of the Church," a tradition going back to Charlemagne, who had been crowned by the pope in Rome in 800. The relationship between France and the papacy was at its peak in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and most of the crusades were called by popes from French soil. Eventually, in 1309, Pope Clement V, a Frenchman, even left Rome and relocated to the French city of Avignon, beginning the era known as the Avignon papacy.

Louis died, probably of dysentery, at Tunis in North Africa at the age of fifty-six in 1270 during his second crusade. He was canonized by Pope Boniface VIII in 1297, the only canonized king of France.

The Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Louis is a Catholic religious order founded in 1842 and named in his honour. Louis is co-patron of the Secular Franciscan Order.

## **A Note on the Just Ruler**

Among the canonized saints are several who, in their day, were political rulers, such as Elizabeth of Hungary, Henry II of Germany, Edward I (the Confessor) of England, Louis IX of France, Wenceslaus of Bohemia, Elizabeth of Portugal, Stephen of Hungary, Margaret of Scotland, Casimir of Poland, and others associated with them in political life, such as Thomas More, who was chancellor to Henry VIII of England.

By canonizing these men and women, the church was trying to promote the ideal of the Just Ruler. This was a way of trying to make society itself Christian, not simply the individual people who made it up. The Christian society - Christendom - was seen as one in which the law of God would, in effect, be the constitution of the state. One aspect of this is that morality is one: while we may distinguish notionally between public and private morality, in reality they are one; the person cannot be divided. What is wrong at the level of individual relationships cannot be right at the level of social, economic, political or cultural ones.

In centuries which were often barbaric, and Christian rulers sometimes acted as unjustly and cruelly as those who made no claim to being Christian, the church was trying to motivate Christian rulers to live according to the Gospel, to move away from a preoccupation with wine, women and war, titles, territories and taxes, and instead to live by the beatitudes. The Just Ruler was seen

as one who would follow Matthew 25.31-46, where the way people treat their fellow human beings is seen as the measure by which they will be judged by God. The care of the poor was seen as a particular benchmark of the genuineness of faith; this is highlighted in the case of the saints listed above.

The saints remained people of their time. Some of the things they did were simply wrong - sinful. Canonization is more than a simple statement that a particular person was holy. It is to say that their life was open to God and that they looked to God for help in their struggles against evil in themselves. It is meant to offer encouragement to others to follow their example. It may be true to say of some that they were canonized despite their sinfulness.

The church supported the king by the rite of anointing taken from the Old Testament precedent of Samuel's anointing of David in place of Saul. (1 Samuel chapters 8-16) This was the beginning of what subsequently became known as the alliance of throne and altar, the benefits of which were usually greater for the throne than for the altar. The so-called "divine right of kings" - which does not mean that the king was divine! - though never formally proclaimed as official teaching, was an extension of the same idea. The Frankish kingdom is an example of this, where the church was under the king's control. Their kings saw Christianity as a bond of political unity in a divided realm. They could have said with Napoleon, 'I regard religion, not as the mystery of the Incarnation, but as the secret of the social order.'

and, 'Never in all my quarrels with the Pope have I touched a dogma.' (Cited by Robert Aubrey Noakes, "Napoleon's Attitude towards Religion," in *The Month*, Vol. CLXXVII, No.919, January-February 1941, p.33) Nonetheless there was some element of religious motivation in the policy of the Frankish kings, especially in Charles Martel and Louis the Pious.

(When Protestants threw off the authority of the pope, they replaced it with that of the monarch. The nationalization of the Lutheran churches in Scandinavia, as one example, paved the way for royal absolutism, since the church was no longer a counter-weight to kingly power. And the confiscation of church property gave monarchs the money they looked for to create professional standing armies and navies, with consequent wars on a larger and more international scale than before, e.g. Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden)

It is highly ironic that Catholic monarchs sometimes created as many difficulties for the church as did Protestant ones. A king like Philip II of Spain, undoubtedly a genuinely pious and committed Catholic, probably exercised as much control over the church as did Henry VIII of England, without, however, claiming to be its head. The infamous Spanish Inquisition was primarily an instrument of royal power with the political agenda of "purifying" Spain of those, like Moors and Jews, who were considered not "real" Spaniards.

By contrast, in 1783, the papal nuncio in Paris contacted the United States Ambassador to France,

Benjamin Franklin, about the possibility of erecting a bishopric in America, to replace the then existing system whereby American Catholics were subject to an Apostolic Vicariate in London. Dr. Franklin wrote to Congress, which sent him this reply,

The subject of his application to Dr. Franklin being purely spiritual, it is without the jurisdiction and powers of Congress, who have no authority to permit or refuse it, these powers being reserved to the several states individually. (*The Records of the Federal Convention*, revised edn. by Max Farrand, Yale, 1937, Vol. IV, p.28. Cf. also Vol. I, p.402)

Later on, the States themselves declared that they had ‘No authority to permit or refuse such a purely spiritual exercise of ecclesiastical jurisdiction.’ John Courtenay Murray, a historian of church-state relations commented,

The good nuncio must have been mightily surprised on reading this communication. Not for centuries had the Holy See been free to erect a bishopric... without all the legal formalities with which Catholic States had fettered the freedom of the Church. (*We hold these Truths*, London, 1961, p.71)

Pope Paul VI, speaking to political rulers at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council on 9 December 1965, set out his hopes for relations with states today,

What does the church ask of you today?.... she asks of you nothing but freedom, the freedom to believe and to preach her faith, the freedom to love God and to serve him, the freedom to live and to bring people its message of life. (*The Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Walter M. Abbott, Chapman, London, 1966, p.693. n.53)

It cannot ask for less than that; it does not ask for more than that. The Just Ruler ideal is a work in progress.



## **SAINT JOSEPH CALASANZ: 25 August**

José (Joseph) was born at the castle of Calasanz near Aragón, Spain, on 11 September 1557. His parents were Don Pedro Calasanz and Doña María Gaston, who gave him, the youngest of eight children, a good education at home, and then at school in Peralta. After classical studies, he took up philosophy and jurisprudence and earned the degree of Doctor of Laws, followed by a theology course at Valencia and Alcalá de Henares.

After the death of his mother and a brother, his father wanted him to marry, but, in 1582, he became very seriously ill. When he recovered, he was ordained priest in 1583. He had several important appointments in more than one diocese. In 1592, he moved to Rome in the hope of furthering his career in the church, and remained there for most of his remaining years. There, he found a protector in Cardinal Marcoantonio Colonna who chose him as his theologian and teacher to his nephew.

In Rome, the needs of neglected and homeless children, some of them orphans, came to his attention. He joined the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine and gathered boys from the streets and brought them to school. Two other priests helped him, and so, in 1597, he opened what has been called the first free public school in Europe. This was a radical break from the class-based education system that kept the great majority of people marginalized and poor. In the history of education, Joseph was an educator of the poor, offering free

education to all classes of society, without discrimination.

His ideas spread, so that, after just five years, he had a thousand boys under his care in Rome, and schools were to follow in other European countries. Pope Clement VIII helped him with an annual donation. He and the teachers began to live a community life, and this gradually developed into the Order of Pious Schools, or Piarists, becoming the first religious institute dedicated essentially to teaching. Pope Gregory XV gave formal approval to the new order in 1622.

In 1610, Joseph wrote a statement of the principles of his educational philosophy, accompanied by regulations for teachers and for students. He broke with tradition in his acceptance of Jewish children in his schools, where they were treated with the same respect as other pupils. Similarly, Protestant pupils were enrolled in his schools in Germany. So great and universal was his prestige that he was even asked by the Turkish Empire to set up schools there, a request which, to his regret, he could not fulfil due to lack of teachers. He organized a method of teaching primary school pupils through progressive levels or cycles, a system of vocational training, and also one of public secondary education. He was concerned, too, with physical education and hygiene. He addressed the subject in various documents, and asked school principals to monitor children's health. Contrary to established practice, the vernacular was the dominant language in his system, though Latin was retained as a subject.

Joseph gave priority to the teaching of mathematics and science. But his main concern was undoubtedly the moral and Christian education of his students. He considered education to be the best way of changing society. All his writing is imbued with Christian ideals, and the regulations of his schools showed the same spirit. He created an image of the ideal Christian teacher, and used it to train teachers who worked with him. In dealing with disciplinary problems, he believed that prevention was better than cure. In sharp contrast to prevailing ideas, he favoured only the mildest corporal punishment, and then only in few cases; he held that kindness was the basis of discipline.

Joseph was a friend of Galileo Galilei, and sent some Piarists to learn from him. He shared and defended Galileo's controversial view of the cosmos. When Galileo was censured by the Inquisition, Joseph told his confreres to provide him with whatever he needed and to continue studying mathematics and science with him. Those opposed to Joseph and his work used this as an excuse to attack the Piarists, but despite this, he continued supporting Galileo. In 1637, when Galileo lost his sight, Joseph sent a Piarist to be his secretary.

Joseph brought the same understanding and sympathy to his friendship with the Dominican Tommaso Campanella (1558–1639). Campanella was one of the most profound and fertile minds of his time, with ideas of social reform based on universal education. Despite the fact that he was a highly controversial figure in his time, Joseph maintained a strong and fruitful friendship

with him. Joseph invited Campanella to Frascati to help teach philosophy to his teachers. It is not surprising, then, that Campanella, who had rallied to the support of Galileo, also later came to the defence of his friend Joseph with his *Liber Apologeticus*.

All this was too much for some establishment figures in church and society. Joseph's ideals of free education for all children, his support of Galileo, and his service to the poor rocked the boat, and they felt he had to be stopped. He was called before the Inquisition and imprisoned, though released after a while. And then, matters became much worse: his enemies found another stick with which to beat him.

The principal of a Piarist school in Naples, Father Stefano Cherubini, was discovered to have been systematically abusing boys sexually, and, in fact, had made no secret of it. Cherubini was a member of a well-connected Roman family of papal lawyers, and told Joseph that, if his wrongdoings were exposed, the Piarists would be destroyed.

Joseph promoted Cherubini - *Promoveatur ut moveatur* (a Latin saying, 'Promote him in order to move him) - to get him away from the school, citing only his luxurious diet and failure to attend prayers as the reasons. He wrote that his aim '... was to cover up this great shame so that it does not come to the notice of our superiors.' Vatican officials did come to know of it, but bowed to the same family interests that had pressured Joseph. Cherubini was appointed visitor-general of the

order, responsible for discipline, and so was able to conduct himself as he wanted in any school he visited. To make matters worse, he was then made head of the order while Joseph was pushed aside. When this happened, Joseph, who had documented Cherubini's long and well-known pattern of child abuse, went public with his information. But even this did nothing to diminish Cherubini's position. When other members of the order objected to his being its superior, the Vatican, in 1646, intervened by suppressing the order!

Joseph was in disgrace, and the system built up over fifty years came close to collapse. He died on 25 August 1648, at the age of ninety. In 1656, Pope Alexander VII cleared the name of the schools, and Joseph was canonized in 1767. In 1948, Pope Pius XII declared him universal patron of all Catholic schools in the world. Today a number of schools bear his name.

## **SAINT MONICA: 27 August**

Born about 331, Monica is assumed to have been of Berber origin, by reason of her name and place of birth, Tagaste, the present-day Souk Ahràs in Algeria. (The Berbers are one of the pre-Arab and pre-Roman peoples of North Africa.) As a young Christian woman, she married at about twenty-two years of age – probably by parental arrangement – a man called Patricius (Patrick), who held an official Roman position in Tagaste. He was a pagan who conformed to official religious expectations as far as his position required. He was violent, given to drunkenness and extra-marital affairs. They had three children: Augustine the eldest, Navigius the second, and a daughter, Perpetua. Monica had been unable to win her husband's consent that the children be baptized. When Augustine became ill, she again asked Patricius to allow him to be baptized, and he agreed. But when Augustine quickly recovered, he withdrew his consent.

Monica's life was unhappy, especially as her mother-in-law seems to have led the way for her son in his habits. Patricius was annoyed by Monica's prayer and service to the poor, and yet, in some way, he also respected her. She found Augustine childishly self-willed and capricious; he himself says he was lazy. He went to school, and then to higher studies in Carthage in present-day Tunisia.

Patricius became a Christian towards the end of his life about 371. After his death, Monica did not re-marry.

Meanwhile, in Carthage, Augustine had become a Manichaean, a follower of the Persian religious leader, Mani, with his philosophy of a struggle between a good, spiritual world of light and an evil, material world of darkness. On his return home, when he told his mother this, she drove him from the family table, but was persuaded to change her attitude as the result of a dream. She prayed daily for his conversion, and went to see a local bishop, who said to her, 'The child of these tears [of yours] will never perish.' (Augustine's *Confessions* 3.12) When Augustine left for Rome and then Milan, she followed him. There she met the bishop, (the later saint) Ambrose, who exercised significant influence on her son, so that he became a Christian some seventeen years later.

In his spiritual autobiography, *The Confessions*, Augustine wrote that his mother

was accustomed to bring to the oratories of the martyrs a heart full of pure petitions, and to give all she could to the poor so that the communion of the Lord's body might be rightly celebrated in those places where, after the example of his passion, the martyrs had been sacrificed and crowned. (6.2.2)

They spent six happy months together, and then, after seventeen years of delay, Augustine was baptized in the church of Saint John the Baptist in Milan at Easter 387. He described Monica as his mother twice over, first in

his physical birth, and second in his spiritual re-birth in baptism after so many years of her prayers and tears.

In the autumn of that year they set out for home, but Monica died at the port of Ostia, south of Rome, at the age of fifty-six. Near the end, she said to Augustine,

For my part I have no further delight in anything in this life. What I am doing here any longer, and for what purpose I am here I do not know, now that my hopes in this world are accomplished. The one thing for which I desired to linger for a while in this life – that I might see you a Catholic Christian before I die – God has done for me.

She also said, ‘To God, nothing is far away. And I have no need to be afraid that, at the end of the world, he will not know where the place of my burial is, when the time comes to raise me up.’

Augustine wrote about her death in his *Confessions*. She was buried in Ostia, but her body was later transferred to the church of Saint Augustine in Rome. Her cult spread from about the thirteenth century, gradually becoming part of the universal calendar of the church. The city of Santa Monica in California takes its name from her.

In 1945, two boys in Rome, digging a hole for a football post, found a tablet bearing her funeral epitaph, written by one Anicius Bassus. It reads,



Here the most virtuous mother of a young man set  
her ashes, a second light to your merits, Augustine.  
As a priest, serving the heavenly laws of peace, you  
taught the people entrusted to you with your  
character. A glory greater than the praise of your  
accomplishments crowns you both - Mother of the  
Virtues, more fortunate because of her offspring.  
(Douglas Boin)

## SAINT AUGUSTINE: 28 August

Augustine was born in 354 in Tagaste in Roman Africa, (now Souk Ahràs in Algeria). His father, Patricius, was a pagan, and his mother, Monica, a Christian. Scholars believe that his ancestors included Berbers, Latins and Phoenicians; his mother's name is Berber. Augustine's family had been Roman, from a legal standpoint, for at least a century, and Latin was probably his first language. He began school at the age of eleven.

At seventeen, Augustine went to Carthage to continue his education. Raised as a Christian by his mother, although not baptized because of his father's opposition, he became - to her great disappointment - a follower of the Persian religion of Mani. He lived a self-indulgent life, associating with men who boasted of their sexual exploits and urged him to imitate them, or at least pretend to, so as to avoid ridicule. (*Confessions* 3.3) It was during this period that he prayed,

Give me chastity, and give me control over myself, but not yet. I was afraid you might answer me too quickly, and straighten me out before I was ready; for what I really wanted was not to be cured but to be satisfied. (*Confessions* 8.7)

He lived with a woman outside of marriage for thirteen years, and had a son by her, Adeodatus, a name which means *Given by God*.

Augustine went on to teach rhetoric in Tagaste, Carthage, and Rome, but could not make a living because, at the end of terms, his students took off without paying their fees! But he was given a valuable academic appointment at the imperial court in Milan.

By now, he was moving away from Manichaeism, disappointed with the failure of its bishop, Faustus, to deal satisfactorily with his doubts about it. He was influenced for a time by the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus. Then he met Ambrose, a Christian bishop, who, like him, was a master of rhetoric. In 386, he read the life of Saint Anthony of Egypt and drew inspiration from it. Then, one day, in a quiet period, he heard a child singing a song, with the refrain, 'Take and read.' He took this as a message from God to read the Bible. He opened it, and read,

Let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and in drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Romans 13.13-14)

This was the turning-point. He converted, and, along with Adeodatus, was baptized by Bishop Ambrose during the Easter Vigil 387, in the church of Saint John the Baptist, at the age of thirty-two.

In later years, reflecting on his conversion, he wrote in his spiritual autobiography, the *Confessions*, 'You have

made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts will know no rest until they rest in you.’ (1.1) And,

Late have I loved you, O beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you! You were within me and I was outside, where I rushed about wildly searching for you like some monster loose in your beautiful world. You were with me, but I was not with you. You called me, you shouted to me, you broke past my deafness. You bathed me in your light, you wrapped me in your splendour, you sent my blindness reeling. You gave out such a delightful fragrance, and I drew it in and came panting after you. I tasted, and it made me hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burned to know your peace. (10.27)

‘My aim now’, he wrote, ‘was not to become more certain of you, but more faithful to you.’ (8.1)

His mother, meanwhile, had arranged a marriage for him with an eleven year old girl This meant leaving Adeodatus’ mother, and he felt this loss deeply. But he had to wait until his fiancée came of age, so, in the meantime, he took a concubine. Eventually he broke off relations with all three. Along with Monica and Adeodatus, he set out to return to Africa in 388, but his mother died at the port of Ostia, south of Rome, on the way, and Adeodatus not long afterwards. Augustine went home to live a life of leisure and study at the family home which became a kind of monastery; he gave the rest of the family property to the poor.

Perhaps these experiences were in some way behind his outlook on women. He wrote to his friend Alypius, 'What is the difference, whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must be aware of in any woman.' (Letter 243.10) He added, 'After all, if it was good company and conversation that Adam needed, it would have been much better to have two men as friends, not a man and a woman.' (*On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 9.5.9) He also wrote, 'Women are not made in the image of God.'

In 391, Augustine was ordained a priest, and, just four years later, coadjutor bishop of Hippo (Algeria), succeeding to the diocese a little later. He remained there until his death as the Vandals invaded in 430. His years in Hippo were filled with preaching, and, especially, writing. When the Vandals, who were Arians, captured Hippo, they destroyed it, except the cathedral and Augustine's library.

His writings are especially significant in regard to the Trinity, original sin, predestination, grace, free will, the church, and just war, but, in fact, he covers almost the whole range of human life and activity in more than a hundred titles, the best-known of which are *The Confessions* and *The City of God*.

He taught that when the Bible conflicts with reason and evidence it should be taken as metaphorical; neither should its history always be taken as strict chronology but rather as extended metaphor. He said, 'Beware of affirming the unknown as known.' (*An Imperfect Work*

on *Genesis*, 9.30) It has often been said that his apparently negative attitude towards human sexuality was the product of his personal history, but others dispute this. He taught that all human nature, not only sexuality, was in need of redemption, and that this culminates in the resurrection. His teaching on several topics has been regarded as inconsistent, and maybe it was, since he was trying to develop his ideas as he matured. (It has been said of him, tongue-in-cheek, and perhaps flippantly, that the reason why he is honoured as a doctor of the church instead of condemned as a heretic is that he contradicted himself so often that no one can be certain what he thought about anything!) Near the end of his life, he wrote a book called *Retractationes*, or *Second Thoughts*, in which he amended earlier statements. He regarded the search for truth as one that is open to doubt, development, and change. 'I believe in order to understand;' and 'I understand, the better to believe.' (*Sermon* 43.7.9) And, 'If faith does not think, it is nothing.' (*On the Predestination of the Saints* 2.5) Despite his vast learning, he was aware of his limitations. About God, he wrote, 'If you understood him, it would not be God' (*Sermon* 52.6.16), and, of the Trinity, 'The formula "Three persons" has been coined, not in order to give a complete explanation by means of it, but in order that we might not be obliged to remain silent.' (*On the Trinity* 5.10)

Augustine was the link between the classical and medieval periods. He was hugely influential in the whole Christian church, including Lutherans and Calvinists. He has influenced modern philosophers such as Russell,

Husserl, Heidegger and Arendt, especially in his thoughts on time and memory. And he makes an appearance in Flann O'Brien's *The Dalkey Archive*.

Saint Jerome wrote to him in 418, 'You are known throughout the world. Catholics honour and esteem you as the one who has established anew the ancient faith.' (*Letter* 195) He was canonized by popular acclaim, and declared Doctor of the Church in 1298 by Pope Boniface VIII. He is patron of theologians.

The following are extracts from his writings: -

"What is God?" I asked the earth, and it replied: "I am not God"; and everything on earth made the same declaration. I asked the sea, the deep and its living things, and they replied: "We are not God." I asked the winds that blow, and all the air and its inhabitants replied: "We are not God." I asked the sky, the moon and the stars, and they replied: "Neither are we the God you seek." I asked everything within me: "Speak to me of God; since you are not God, tell me something about God." And they cried out in a loud voice: "It is God who made us." My request was born of my reflection and their beauty was their response. Then I turned to myself and asked: "Who are you?" The reply came back: "A person." God, then, is the life of your life.' (*Confessions* 10.6)

'There are many whom God has and the church does not have them. And there are many whom the church has, and God does not have them.' (*On Baptism* 5.27.38)

‘Happy are those who love you, my God, and their friends in you, and their enemies because of you.’  
(*Confessions* 4.9)

‘God became man that man might become God.’  
(Sermon 13, *On the Nativity of the Lord*) That is also attributed to Saint Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54.3; the latter pre-dated the former.

‘If Christ has first chosen a man skilled in public speaking, such a man might well have said: "I have been chosen on account of my eloquence." If he had chosen a senator, the senator might have said, "I have been chosen because of my rank." If his first choice had been an emperor, the emperor surely might have said: "I have been chosen for the sake of the power I have at my disposal." Let these worthies keep quiet and defer to others; let them hold their peace for a while. I am not saying that they should be passed over or despised; I am simply asking all those who can find any grounds for pride in what they are to give way to others just a little. Christ says: Give me this fisherman, this man without education or experience, this man to whom no senator would deign to speak, not even if he were buying fish. Yes, give me him; once I have taken possession of him, it will be obvious that it is I who am at work in him. Although I meant to include senators, orators and emperors among my recruits, even when I have won over the senator I shall still be surer of the fisherman. The senator can always take pride in what he is; so can the orator and the emperor, but the fisherman can glory in nothing except Christ alone.’ (Sermon 43.5-6)



‘You are told to love God. If you say to me: show me whom I am to love, what shall I say if not what Saint John says: No one has ever seen God! But in case you should think that you are completely cut off from the sight of God, he says: God is love, and he who remains in love remains in God. Love your neighbour, then, and see within yourself the power by which you love your neighbour; there you will see God, as far as you are able. Begin, then, to love your neighbour. Share your bread with the hungry and bring into your home the homeless poor; clothe anyone you see to be naked, and do not despise your own flesh and blood.

What will you gain by doing this? Your light will shine forth like the dawn. Your light is your God: he is your dawn, for he will come to you when the night of time is over. He does not rise or set but remains for ever.

By loving other people and caring for them you make progress on your journey. Where are you travelling if not to the Lord God, to him whom we should love with our whole heart, our whole soul, or our whole mind? We have not yet reached his presence, but we have our neighbour at our side. Support, then, this companion of your pilgrimage if you want to come into the presence of the one with whom you desire to remain for ever.’ (Homilies on the Gospel of John, 17.7-9; CCL 36. 174-175)

‘The desire of your heart is itself your prayer. And if the desire is constant, so is your prayer. Not for nothing did the apostle tell us to pray without ceasing. But did he mean that we were to be perpetually on our knees, lying prostrate, or raising our hands? Is this what he meant by

praying without ceasing? Even if we admit that we pray in this fashion, I do not believe that we can do so all the time. Yet there is another, interior kind of prayer without ceasing, namely the desire of the heart.... Therefore, if you wish to pray without ceasing, do not cease to desire. The constancy of your desire will itself be the ceaseless voice of your prayer.... The chilling of love means that the heart is silent. If your love is without ceasing, you are always crying out; if you are always crying out, you are always desiring; and if you desire, you are calling to mind your eternal rest in the Lord.' (Exposition of the Psalms, 37.13-14; CCL 38.391-392)

## **SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST, HIS PASSION: 29 August**

John was arrested (Matthew 4.12), imprisoned and executed by Herod Antipas the tetrarch for denouncing Herod's incestuous marriage with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife (Mark 6.14-29) and 'because of all the evil things that Herod had done.' (Luke 3.19) Herod had pushed his brother Philip aside and taken his wife for himself. She responded by contriving John's execution, opportunistically taking advantage of a foolish promise made by Herod during a drunken party. (See Matthew 14.1-12; Mark 6.14-28; Luke 9.7-9) John life was taken from him on a whim.

Herod was afraid of John (Mark 6.20), perhaps because he knew he could not control, manipulate or intimidate him, and that John would speak the truth regardless. The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, described John as 'someone wholly dedicated to the truth.' (*The Jewish Wars*, Pelican edition, London, near the end.) Mark says of Herod, 'when he heard him, he was greatly perplexed.' Herod danced to a different tune from John; they worked on different scales of values and priorities. And yet he 'liked to listen to him.' Surrounded as he likely was by sycophants, it might have come as a relief to him to hear someone speak the truth. (This is like the relationship between the Russian ruler, Ivan the Terrible, and Vassily, the Holy Fool. Analogously, the court jester in Shakespeare's plays is often the only one talking sense, the only one who dares to speak the truth.)

Josephus suggests a different starting-point. He wrote that Herod arrested John because he was popular (see John 10.41) and therefore a potential source of opposition. John's rebuke may have provided a handy excuse, if he felt the need for one. Mark the evangelist has got the details of Herod's matrimonial entanglements wrong. That is not surprising, as they were complicated, and the Herod family's habit of giving members different combinations of the same few names made matters more difficult: Philip was the husband of Salome (the dancer), not of Herodias; Salome was a daughter of Herod Philip and Herodias, who had first been married to another Herod who was a half-brother of Herod Antipas. Not easy to follow.

When Herod's birthday party warmed up, it is not unlikely that he became drunk, and then made his stupid promise, which he regretted, but did not have the courage to withdraw, for fear of loss of face. But the vindictiveness of the girl and her mother is startling, even by the standards of the day.

Perhaps Mark's story of the unjust killing of a popular hero has been embellished; that is not uncommon. It shows signs of editorial work undertaken with a view to creating an impression: 'When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.' (6.29) In 15.45-46, Jesus' disciples do the same for him. Ironically, it was Herod who spoke of John's 'resurrection,' saying, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.' (6.16) This may have been intended by Mark to foreshadow the resurrection of Jesus in 16.6. The sense

that Mark is suggesting a parallel between John and Jesus is reinforced by noting that he calls John ‘a righteous and holy man’; Jesus is called ‘the Holy and Righteous One’ in Acts 3.14. Mark says of John that Herod ‘liked to listen to him’ (v.20); and, of Jesus, that ‘the large crowd was listening to him with delight.’ (12.37) By doing so, Mark may be suggesting that John’s fate will be that of Jesus also.

It seems highly likely that Mark drew on the story of King Ahasuerus (Greek, Xerxes) in the Old Testament book of Esther. Six times in vv.14-26, Mark calls Herod king, even though he wasn’t. He was tetrarch, ruler of a quarter of a kingdom, and Mark must have known that. In Esther, King Ahasuerus ‘gave a banquet for all his officials and ministers’ (1.3); ‘drinking was by flagons without restraint.’ (1.8) ‘When the king was merry with wine’ (1.10), he quarrelled with his queen, Vashti, and dismissed her. Then Esther comes on the scene: ‘the girl pleased him (2.9); ‘she won his favour and devotion, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen.’ (2.17) Another banquet, called “Esther’s banquet”, followed: ‘As they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.”’ (7.2) Esther asks for the life of her ‘foe and enemy’ (7.6), and her wish is granted; he is killed. (7.10)

The parallels between the stories are too strong to be coincidental. The book of Esther is unusual: it makes no mention of God; alone of Old Testament books, no

remains of it in Hebrew were found at Qumran; and biblical scholars describe it as an historical romance. Why did Mark insinuate allusions to such a problematic source? They don't enhance the credibility of his account.

Mark inserted the story between the sending of the Twelve (6.6b-13), and their return. (6.30-32) Why? Perhaps it was to dramatize the cost of discipleship.

'He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease' (John 3.30) could be described as the key to understanding the life and death of John the Baptist. It sums up his life and ministry. Pope Francis has said of him,

John seems to be nothing. That is John's vocation: he negates himself. And when we contemplate the life of this man, so great, so powerful – all believed that he was the Messiah – when we contemplate this life, how it is nullified to the point of the darkness of a prison, we behold a great mystery. We do not know what John's last days were like. We know only that he was killed, his head was put on a platter, as a great gift from a dancer to an adulteress. I don't think you can lower yourself much more than this, negate yourself much more. That was the end that John met.

But there may be some clue about his last days. Matthew relates that, 'When John heard in prison what the Christ was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him,

"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you".! (Matthew 11.2-10)

In the isolation and fear of his prison cell, perhaps John had experienced doubts: was Jesus really the one? Have I made a fool of myself? Perhaps this is all a mistake and it will cost me my life? So he asks for re-assurance. The answer he gets recalls the words of Isaiah about the Messiah: 'the blind receive their sight...' (Isaiah 35.3-6; 29.18; 6.19) Jesus is saying, in effect, 'If I am doing the things the scriptures say the Messiah will do, then draw the appropriate conclusion.' If Jesus had replied saying, "Yes, I'm the Messiah," that would have meant nothing. Anyone could make such a claim. But he pointed to what he was doing as objective evidence in his support, so what other conclusion was there to be drawn except that he was the awaited one?

John was found worthy of a martyr's death, his last and greatest act of witness to Jesus. In this, as in his birth and preaching, he was the Forerunner (Precursor) of Jesus, who gave him the highest praise in saying of him that 'of all children born of women, there is no one greater than John.' (Matthew 11.11; Luke 7.28)



## **POPE SAINT GREGORY I, THE GREAT: 3 September**

Gregory was born in Rome about the year 540 into a wealthy patrician family. When he was two years old, the empire was swept by plague, either bubonic or pneumonic, and an estimated twenty-five million people died, about a third of the population. Then there was war: when he was seven, the Goths sacked Rome but Emperor Justinian I, ruling from Constantinople, re-took Italy from them by about 552. A Frankish invasion in 554 was defeated. Gregory may have lived in Sicily during those troubled times. These disasters may be the source of the sadness which pervades his writings, and especially his expectation of a speedy end to the world.

He was educated in Latin, but not Greek, and trained in law, probably for a career in public life. About the year 573, when about thirty-three years old, he became prefect of the city of Rome. This was the highest civil dignity in the city, though by then mostly honorific.

Gregory had a deep respect for monastic life and became a monk in 574, following his father's death. He followed the way of life established by Saint Benedict, and devoted himself to the work and austerity of his new life with all the natural energy of his character. He gave up his Sicilian estates to found six monasteries there, and his home in Rome was converted into another. It was said of him that, 'He who had been wont to go about the city aglow with silk and jewels, now served the altar of

the Lord clad in worthless garments.’ (Jeffrey Richards, *Consul of God*, Routledge and Keagan Paul, London, 1980, p. 26, quoting Gregory of Tours, X, i) In that same spirit, he wrote,

You give up much if you give up the desire to possess. The Lord looks at your heart, not your fortune; he considers the love that prompts your offering, not its amount.... As I said, the kingdom of God costs whatever you have. (Homily on the Gospels, I. Homily 5; PL 76.1093-1094)

For about three years Gregory lived in a monastery, a period he spoke of as the happiest in his life. His great austerities during this time are recorded by biographers, and probably caused the bad health from which he constantly suffered in later life.

He had limitations and was not always Christian in his attitudes, even in his monastic years. For example, a monk lying on his death bed confessed to stealing three gold pieces. Gregory forced him to die friendless and alone, and then threw his body and the coins on a manure heap, with the curse, ‘Take your money with you to hell.’ (Carole E. Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1988, p.47) He believed that money above what was required for one’s needs rightly belonged to the poor, and should be given to them. In keeping with patristic tradition, he wrote, ‘When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are

merely paying a debt of justice.’ (*Pastoral Rule*, 3.21; PL 77.87)

He also wrote, ‘Woman is slow in understanding and her unstable and naïve mind renders her by way of natural weakness to the necessity of a strong hand in her husband. Her “use” is two-fold: animal sex and motherhood.’ (This was also the position of Martin Luther, who said, ‘Let women bear children to death; they were created for that.’)

Against Gregory’s wish, Pope Pelagius II ordained him a deacon and then, in 579, chose him as ambassador to the imperial court in Constantinople where he spent six years. Nothing could have been more uncongenial to Gregory than the atmosphere of the Byzantine court. To counteract its influence he followed the monastic life as far as he could. He prayed and studied the scriptures, one result of which is a series of lectures on the Book of Job, composed during this period. Gregory had come to ask the emperor for military aid against the Lombards, who were Arians. But, with the Byzantine military focused on the East, his requests were ignored. In 584, the pope wrote to Gregory, detailing the hardships that Rome was experiencing under the Lombards and requesting him to ask Emperor Maurice to send a relief force. It soon became obvious to Gregory that the Byzantine emperors were unlikely to help, given their own more immediate difficulties with the Persians in the East and the Avars and Slavs to the North.

One writer states, 'If Gregory's principal task was to plead Rome's cause before the emperor, there seems to have been little left for him to do once imperial policy toward Italy became evident. Papal representatives who pressed their claims with excessive vigour could quickly become a nuisance and find themselves excluded from the imperial presence altogether.' (Andrew J. Ekonomou, *Byzantine Rome and the Greek Popes: Eastern influences on Rome and the papacy from Gregory the Great to Zacharias, A.D. 590–752*, Lexington Books, 2007, p.10.)

Gregory cultivated connections with the elite of the city, where he became extremely popular with the city's upper class, especially aristocratic women. But this did not significantly advance the interests of Rome before the emperor; his efforts ended in failure. His period as ambassador taught him a lesson which would guide him later as pope. It was that no help was to be expected from Byzantium, and that, if Rome and Italy were to be saved at all, it could only be by vigorous independent action on the spot.

Gregory left Constantinople for Rome in 585, and with the greatest joy returned to his monastery, of which he soon became abbot. It grew famous under his rule, producing many monks who later exercised significant influence. Many vivid pictures of this period may be found in his *Dialogues*. But although he was resolved to live a life of contemplation, he was unwillingly forced back to a life he no longer wanted to be part of. He wrote,

I sought the haven of the monastery... but as the vessel that is negligently moored is very often, when the storm grows violent, tossed by the water out of its shelter on the safest shore, so, on account of ecclesiastical office, I found myself suddenly plunged in a sea of secular matters, and, because I had not held firmly the tranquillity of the monastery when I had it, I learned by losing it how closely it should have been held. (From his *Moralia*)

The year 589 was disastrous for the Western Empire. In Italy there was an unprecedented flood. Disease followed, and Rome became a city of the dead. Business stopped, and the streets were deserted except for wagons carrying corpses for burial. Then, in 590, Pope Pelagius II died. The choice of a successor lay with the clergy and people of Rome. Without hesitation, they chose Gregory. In spite of their unanimity, he shrank from the office. He knew, no doubt, that acceptance meant a final good-bye to the monastic life he loved, so he not only refused but wrote to the emperor, asking him not to confirm the election. But the prefect of the city suppressed the letter, and sent instead the schedule of the election. Gregory never ceased to regret becoming bishop of Rome, and his later writings contain numberless expressions of his strong feelings about it. He said, 'I am in this place, tossed by such storms of the world, that I am in no way able to steer into port the old and rotten ship over which, in the hidden dispensation of God, I have assumed the guidance.'

On one occasion, while still a monk, Gregory had seen some Englishmen in the Roman Forum. Struck by their appearance, he said they looked, ‘not like Angles but like angels.... They are well-named, for they have angelic faces and ought to be co-heirs with the angels in heaven.’ (William Hunt, *The Political History of England*, London, Longmans, Green, 1906. p.115) He wanted to go to England as a missionary but was recalled by the pope. However, as pope, he sent a mission under Saint Augustine (of Canterbury) to evangelize the Anglo-Saxons. He instructed a priest, Candidus, in Gaul by letter to buy young English male slaves for placement in monasteries; they were intended for missionary work in England. (Maria Luisa Ambrosini and Mary Willis, *The Secret Archives of the Vatican*, Barnes & Noble Publishing, USA, 1996, p.71.) This was successful, and it was from England that missionaries later set out for the Netherlands and Germany. Gregory is revered as the source of the conversion of Kent. The spread of the Catholic faith was one of his priorities.

Gregory revised the liturgy of the Eucharist, and the sacramentaries that followed bear his name, though mostly influenced by the later Pope Hadrian I and Charlemagne’s teacher, Alcuin. With them, the Western liturgy, unlike that of the East, has a number of prayers that change to reflect the feast or liturgical season. “Gregorian” chant, despite its name, does not come from him.

Gregory is the only pope between the fifth and the eleventh centuries whose correspondence and writings

have survived to form a comprehensive corpus. His principal writings are: -

*Sermons* (forty on the Gospels are recognized as authentic, twenty-two on Ezekiel, two on the Song of Songs);

*Dialogues*, a collection of miracles, signs, wonders, and healings including the popular life of Saint Benedict;

*Commentary on Job*, frequently known by its Latin title, *Magna Moralia*;

*The Pastoral Rule*, a statement of the nature of the office of bishop in which he contrasts their role as pastors of the flock with their role as nobles of the church.

Copies of some 854 letters have survived, giving a picture of the life of the church in his time, and of Gregory himself. One writer states,

His character strikes us as an ambiguous and enigmatic one.... On the one hand he was an able and determined administrator, a skilled and clever diplomat, a leader of the greatest sophistication and vision; but on the other hand, he appears in his writings as a superstitious and credulous monk, hostile to learning, crudely limited as a theologian, and excessively devoted to saints, miracles, and relics. (Norman F. Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, Harper, New York, 1993, p.157)

Gregory is known for his system of relief for the poor in Rome. They were predominantly refugees from raids by the Lombards. His idea was that wealth belonged to

the poor, and the church was only its steward. He received generous donations from wealthy families in Rome, but he gave these away, writing, 'I hold the office of steward to the property of the poor.' The church received donations of many kinds: food and clothing; investment property; real estate and works of art; capital goods, revenue-generating property such as Sicilian estates worked by slaves and donated by Gregory and his family. It already had a system for supplying food to the poor: associated with each parish was a relief office.

The Rome of which Gregory became pope in 590 was ruined. The Lombards held most of Italy, and their raids had brought the economy to a standstill. They camped near Rome, so that the city was packed with refugees from all walks of life, living in the streets with few of the necessities of life. The seat of imperial government was in Constantinople, which was unwilling or unable to undertake relief.

In 590, Gregory could wait for Constantinople no longer. He organized the resources of the church into an administration for general relief. In doing, so he evinced a talent for and understanding of principles of accounting, which were not to be bettered for centuries. Everything - recipients and circumstances - was recorded. Revenue was recorded in ledgers listing the expenses and the assets of the church. A central papal administration kept the ledgers and issued lists of property for which each parish priest was responsible.



Gregory began by demanding that his churchmen seek out and relieve needy persons; he reprimanded them if they did not. In a letter to a subordinate in Sicily he wrote,

I asked you most of all to take care of the poor. And if you knew of people in poverty, you should have pointed them out ... I desire that you give the woman, Pateria, forty solidi for children's shoes and forty bushels of grain ....

Soon he was replacing administrators who would not cooperate, at the same time adding new ones in a build-up to a great plan he had in mind. He understood that expenses must be matched by income. To meet his increased expenses he liquidated investment property and paid out expenses in cash according to a budget. Churchmen were paid four times a year and also given a golden coin for their work.

Money, however, was no substitute for food in a city that was on the brink of famine. Even the wealthy were going hungry in their villas. The church now owned between 3,400 and 4,700 km<sup>2</sup> of revenue-generating farmland, divided into large sections. It produced goods of all kinds, which Gregory shipped to Rome for distribution. He gave orders to step up production, set quotas and put an administrative structure in place to carry it out. At the bottom were those who produced the goods, some of whom were slaves, or owned them. They turned over part of the produce to those from whom he leased the land. Grain, wine, cheese, meat, fish and oil

began to arrive at Rome in large quantities, where it was given away for nothing as alms.

Distribution took place monthly. However, some people lived on the streets, or were too ill or infirm to pick up their food supply, so Gregory sent out relief workers, mainly monks, every morning with prepared food. It is said that he would not dine until the needy were fed. When he did dine he shared the table with twelve poor guests. To the needy living in wealthy homes, he sent meals to spare them the indignity of receiving a hand-out. Hearing of the death of a poor person in a back room he was depressed for days, considering that he had failed in his duty and was no better than a murderer.

These and other good deeds completely won the hearts and minds of the Roman people. They looked to the papacy for government, ignoring the empire at Constantinople, which had only disrespect for Gregory, calling him a fool for his pacifist dealings with the Lombards. The office of urban prefect went without candidates. From the time of Gregory the Great to the rise of Italian nationalism the papacy was the most influential force in ruling Italy.

Fourteen years of life remained to Gregory, and into these he crowded work enough to exhaust the energies of a lifetime. What makes his achievement more remarkable is his constant ill-health. He suffered almost continually from indigestion, attacks of fever, and gout.

In spite of these, his biographer, Paul the Deacon, says, 'He never rested.' (*Life*, XV)

At the outset of his pontificate Gregory published his book *The Pastoral Rule*, on the office of bishop, in which he lays down clearly the lines he considered it his duty to follow. This remained for centuries the textbook of the Catholic episcopate, so that by its influence his ideals shaped the direction of the church.

In 595, Gregory held a synod in Saint Peter's, which consisted almost wholly of the bishops and priests of the Roman churches. Six decrees dealing with ecclesiastical discipline were passed, some of them confirming changes already made by him alone. He also insisted strongly on the holding of local synods as ordered by the Council of Nicaea, and letters of his exist addressed to bishops in Sicily, Sardinia, and Gaul reminding them of their duties in this respect. He wrote, 'Our redeemer has shown himself to be one person with the holy church which he has taken to himself.' (Preface to *Moralia in Job*, 14; PL 75, 525 A)

With no imperial administration left in Rome, responsibility for it fell to him, even in military matters. He acted independently, appointing governors to cities, providing munitions for war, giving orders to generals, sending ambassadors to kings, and negotiating peace treaties. Whatever the theory may have been, there is no doubt that, besides his spiritual jurisdiction, Gregory actually exercised much temporal power.

The reign of Gregory marks an epoch in papal history, especially in respect of his attitude towards the imperial government in Constantinople. He seems to have looked upon church and state as co-operating to form a united whole, while acting in two distinct spheres, ecclesiastical and secular. Over this commonwealth were the pope and the emperor, each supreme in his own role, care being taken to keep these as far as possible distinct and independent. Gregory retained a spirit of independence which enabled him, when he considered it necessary, to address the emperor in terms of startling directness. Had the empire been strong instead of in a hopelessly corrupt state when he became pope, it is hard to say how his views might have worked out. As it was, his independence, his efficiency, and his courage carried all before them, and when he died there was no longer any question as to who was the first power in Italy.

With regard to things spiritual, he impressed upon people's minds to an unprecedented degree the idea that the see of Peter was the one supreme, decisive authority in the Catholic Church. During his pontificate, he established close relations between the church of Rome and those of Spain, Gaul, Africa, and Illyricum, while his influence in Britain was such that he is called the Apostle of Kent. In the Eastern churches, too, papal authority was exercised with a frequency unusual before his time, and the patriarch of Alexandria submitted himself to Gregory's commands. A system of appeals to Rome was established; he vetoed or confirmed the decrees of synods, annulled the decisions of patriarchs, and inflicted punishment on ecclesiastical dignitaries as

he thought right. He refused to recognize the title of Ecumenical Patriarch adopted by the Patriarch of Constantinople.

Nor was his work less noteworthy in its effect on the temporal position of the papacy. In the absence of leadership from the emperor in Constantinople and the collapse of the empire in the West, there was no other institution or person who could exercise supra-national authority in Europe and prevent it from sliding into chaos. Seizing the opportunity which circumstances offered, he made himself into a power stronger than emperor or bishop, and established a political influence which dominated - some would say burdened - the peninsula for centuries. From this time the people of Italy looked to the pope for leadership, and Rome as the papal capital continued to be the centre of the Christian world.

Gregory's work as a theologian and doctor of the church is less notable. In the history of dogmatic development he is important for summing up the teaching of the earlier Fathers and consolidating it into a harmonious whole, rather than introducing new developments, methods or solutions to old questions. It was because of these approaches that his writings became to a great extent the textbooks of the Middle Ages, a position for which his work in popularizing his great predecessors fitted him well. Achievements so varied won for him the title of 'Gregory the Great.' Perhaps reflecting his own spirituality, he wrote, 'the

sacred Scriptures grow with the one reading them.’  
(*Homily on Ezekiel*, 1.7.8; PL 76.843 D)

In his lifetime, Gregory allowed himself to be depicted with a halo, but was also the first bishop of Rome to make extensive use of the title, “Servant of the Servants of God”, initiating a practice that was to be followed by most subsequent popes. He was not a man of profound learning, not a philosopher or theologian, hardly even a conversationalist. He was a Roman lawyer and administrator, a monk, a missionary, a preacher, above all a physician of souls and a leader of men. He is often seen as a man poised between the Roman and Germanic worlds, between East and West, and between ancient and medieval times. (R.A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*, Cambridge University Press, p.69.) His great claim to remembrance is that he was the father of the medieval papacy. He exercised in many respects a momentous influence on the doctrine, the organization, and the discipline of the Catholic church: -

To him we must look for an explanation of the religious situation of the Middle Ages; indeed, if no account were taken of his work, the evolution of the form of medieval Christianity would be almost inexplicable. And further, in so far as the modern Catholic system is a legitimate development of medieval Catholicism, of this too Gregory may not unreasonably be termed the Father. Almost all the leading principles of later Catholicism are found, at any rate in germ, in Gregory the Great. (Frederick H. Dudden, *Gregory*

*the Great*, London, Longmans, Green, and Co.,  
1905, 1, p. v)

Immediately after his death in 604, he was declared a saint by popular acclamation. Even the Protestant reformer, John Calvin, admired him, and declared in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book IV) that he was the last good pope! Gregory's feast day is on the day of his ordination as bishop.

His life illustrates the ambiguity surrounding human existence. Gregory fed the poor of Rome – but it was slavery on the Sicilian estates which made that possible. He defended Rome and central Italy successfully against invasion – but at the cost of the church stepping into the shoes of the former Roman Empire and advancing the process of creating an imperial papacy.

## **SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM: 13 September**

John was born in Antioch, Syria, in 349 to Greco-Syrian parents who may have been Christian. His father died soon after his birth, and he was raised by his mother. He was baptised in 368 or 373. Educated by a pagan teacher, he developed a love for Greek language and literature. He trained also in rhetoric, and learned a current popular style which used strong and colourful images, often in denunciation. As he grew, he became more committed to the Christian faith, and went on to study theology. In 375, he began living an ascetic life as a hermit, but, as a result, his stomach and kidneys were permanently damaged and poor health forced him to return to Antioch. It was said that he learned the Bible by heart during this time.

John was ordained priest in 386. In Antioch, he became popular because of his preaching, especially his moral teaching and expositions of the Bible. The themes of his sermons were practical, explaining the Bible's application to daily life. He emphasised charitable giving, and spoke against a lack of social conscience in the use of personal property. He was concerned for the needs of the poor and founded hospitals for them.

One incident during this time illustrates his influence. When he came to Constantinople, the bishop was intervening with the emperor on behalf of citizens who had rioted, mutilating statues of him and his family. During Lent of 387, John preached twenty-one homilies



in which he asked the people to change their ways. These made a lasting impression on them, and, consequently, Theodosius' vengeance was not as severe as it might have been.

In the autumn of 397, John was appointed Archbishop of Constantinople, having been nominated without his knowledge. It was said that he had to leave Antioch in secret due to fears that his departure would cause unrest because of his popularity there.

During his time as archbishop he refused to host lavish social gatherings. This made him popular with the people, but unpopular with wealthy citizens and the clergy. His reforms of the clergy were also unpopular with them. He told wandering preachers to return to the churches they were meant to be serving - without payment. But he supported monks who, about 405, began destroying pagan temples and shrines.

John could be considered either tactless or fearless when denouncing offences in high places. He made an enemy of Eudoxia, the emperor's wife, who assumed (perhaps correctly) that his denunciations of extravagance in dress were aimed at her. And Theophilus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, wanted to bring Constantinople under his rule and opposed John's appointment there. He accused John of being too partial to the teachings of the theologian, Origen. Theophilus had disciplined four Egyptian monks over their support of Origen's teachings; John welcomed them. An alliance was soon formed against him by Eudoxia, Theophilus

and other enemies. They held a synod in 403 to bring charges against him, in which his connection to Origen was used against him; it resulted in his deposition and banishment. But he was recalled by the emperor almost immediately, as the people became angry over his departure. Also, there was an earthquake on the night of his arrest, which Eudoxia took as a sign of God's anger, leading her to ask her husband to reinstate him.

But peace was short-lived. A silver statue of Eudoxia was erected near the cathedral. John spoke harshly against her, saying, 'Again Herodias raves; again she is troubled; she dances again; and again she desires to receive John's head on a dish,' an allusion to the events surrounding the death of John the Baptist. (See Mark 6.17-29) Once again he was banished, this time to Armenia in the Caucasus. Pope Innocent I protested at his banishment, but to no avail. Innocent sent a delegation to intercede on John's behalf in 405, but it never succeeded in entering Constantinople. John's banishments were linked to ongoing rivalry between the sees of Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople, though he was destined later to bring about reconciliation, bringing them into communion after a separation of nearly seventy years.

Known as the greatest preacher of the early church, John's homilies have been one of his greatest legacies. Many are very long and would have taken several hours to deliver. But they were so popular that he became known as John of the Golden Mouth (Chrysostom). There were hundreds of homilies on both Old and New

Testaments, especially on Genesis and Saint Paul. Among his extant works are sixty-seven homilies on Genesis, fifty-nine on the Psalms, ninety on the Gospel of Matthew, eighty-eight on the Gospel of John, fifty-five on the Acts of the Apostles, over two hundred and forty letters, and seventeen treatises. They were written down by their hearers and circulated, revealing a style that was direct and personal, but also influenced by the sometimes aggressive rhetorical conventions of his time and place. He used both literal and allegorical interpretations of the Bible.

John's social and religious world was influenced by the continuing and pervasive presence of paganism in the life of the city. One of his regular topics was paganism in the culture of Constantinople, and in his homilies he thundered against popular entertainments: the theatre, horseraces, and the revelry surrounding holidays. In particular, he criticized Christians for taking part in such activities, saying, 'If you ask [Christians] who is Amos or Obadiah, or how many apostles there were or prophets, they are silent, but if you ask them about horses or drivers, they answer with more solemnity than public speakers.'

His homilies on Saint Paul's letters treat the texts verse by verse, often going into great detail. He wished to be understood by laypeople, sometimes offering colourful analogies and practical examples. At other times, he offered extended comments to address theological subtleties or to demonstrate a deeper theme. The following is an excerpt from one of these sermons: -

When I hear that Christ was crucified, I am filled with amazement at his love for us, but to the unbeliever this shows weakness. When I hear that Christ became a servant, I am astonished at his solicitude for us, but to the unbeliever this is a disgrace. When I hear that Christ died, I marvel at his power, since he was not conquered by death, but instead put an end to death. The unbeliever, however, sees Christ's death as a sign of helplessness. The unbeliever regards the resurrection as pure fiction, but I accept the proven facts and venerate God's saving plan. In baptism, the unbeliever sees only water, but I perceive not only what meets the eye, but also the purification of the soul by the Holy Spirit. The unbeliever thinks only the body is cleansed, but I believe that the soul is also made pure and holy, and I am reminded of the tomb, the resurrection, our sanctification, justification, redemption, adoption and inheritance of the kingdom of heaven and the gift of the Holy Spirit. I judge outward appearances not by what I see but by the eyes of the mind. When the body of Christ is mentioned, the words have one meaning for me, and another for the unbeliever. (Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7.1-2)

One of the recurring features of John's homilies is his emphasis on care for the needy. Echoing themes found in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, he called upon the rich to lay aside materialism in favour of helping the poor: -

Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only to neglect him outside when he is cold and ill-clad. He who said, “This is my body” is the same who said: “You saw me hungry and you gave me no food”, and “Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me”... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices when your brother is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger, and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well. Will you make a cup of gold and withhold a cup of water? What use is it to adorn the altar with cloth-of-gold hangings and deny Christ a coat for his back? What would that profit you? Tell me: if you saw someone starving and refused to give him any food, but instead spent your money on adorning the altar with gold, would Christ thank you? Would he not rather be outraged? Or if you saw someone in rags and stiff with cold, and did not give him clothing but set up gold columns in his honour, would he not say that he was being made a fool of and insulted? (*Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, 50. 3-4; in PG 58.508-509)

John used his rhetorical skills to shame wealthy people to abandon conspicuous consumption, saying, ‘It is not possible for a person to be wealthy and just at the same time,’ and also, ‘Do you honour your excrement so much that you deposit it in a silver chamber-pot while a person made in the image of God dies with cold?’ (J.H.W.G. Liebeschütz, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church*

*and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990, p.176) He also said, 'Not to share one's wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs.' (*De Lazaro Concio*, II, 6 in PG 48.992D)

During his first two years in Antioch (386-387), John addressed eight homilies, translated as *Against the Jews*, to Christians in his congregation who took part in Jewish festivals and observances. They were uncompromising. He said, 'Demons dwell in synagogues and in the souls of Jews.' (Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries: was the "Original Jesus" a Pagan God?* Three Rivers Press, New York, 1999, p.310, n.102) His purpose was to prevent Christians participating in Jewish customs, and the consequent perceived erosion of their faith. He claimed that, on the Sabbath, synagogues were full of Christians, especially women, who loved Jewish liturgy, listening to Jewish preachers, and to the sound of the *shofar* [ram's horn trumpet] at the Jewish New Year. It seems he was trying to persuade Jewish Christians, who for centuries had kept connections with Jews and Judaism, to choose between Judaism and Christianity. While some argue that to call him anti-Semitic is to ignore the conventional modes of expression of his time, which favoured strong language, especially in denunciation, it remains true that his statements about Jews and Judaism encouraged anti-Semitism by Christians.

John said of women, ‘You are the devil’s gateway, you are she who persuaded him [Adam] whom the devil did not dare to attack. Do you not know that every one of you is an Eve? The sentence of God on your sex lives on in this age; of necessity, the guilt lives on, too.’ (*On the Dress of Women*, 1.1.2) And – perhaps more foot-in-mouth than golden-mouthed - he said, ‘Women are a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil,’ (Homily 15) and ‘Women do not have the intelligence to be priests.’ (*On the Priesthood*, 2.2, PG 48.633, cited by Garry Wills, *Papal Sin*, p.108.)

A number of John's treatises have had a lasting influence. One is his early treatise, *Against those who oppose the Monastic Life*, written before 386, which was directed against parents who opposed their sons’ calling to the monastic vocation. It was a sharp attack on the values of upper-class urban society written by a member of that class. Other important treatises written by him include *On the Priesthood*, *Instructions to Catechumens*, and *On the Incomprehensibility of the Divine Nature*. In addition, he wrote letters to a deaconess, Olympias, of which seventeen remain.

He had some beautiful sayings, ‘Nothing brings more happiness than a good conscience.’ (Commentary on 2 Corinthians, Homily 12.4) ‘Enter into the door of your heart, and you will find that it is also the door to the Kingdom of God.’ ‘Everywhere, no matter where you find yourself, you can erect an altar to God in your heart by means of prayer.’ He also said,

Prayer is a port in a storm, the anchor of the shipwrecked, a support for the staggering, the treasure of the poor, refuge in evil, mother of philosophy. It is the light of the soul, a wall of protection for the church, and as indispensable for monks as water is for fish.

John's other lasting influence is on Christian liturgy. Two of his writings are particularly notable. He harmonized the liturgical life of the church by revising the Divine Liturgy, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. To this day, Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches of the Byzantine Rite celebrate the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom as the normal Eucharistic liturgy, although his precise connection with it is a matter of debate.

At a time when city clergy were criticized for their lifestyle, John was determined to reform his clergy in Constantinople. He met with much resistance and little success. He is generally considered the most prominent teacher of the Greek Church. More of his writings have survived to the present day than any of the other Greek fathers.

As a result of later writings, John was again banished and died at Comana in 407 on his way to exile in Georgia. His last words are said to have been, 'Glory be to God for all things.'

John was venerated as a saint soon after his death. The Eastern Orthodox Church commemorates him, together



with Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzus, as one of the three holy hierarchs.

## A Note on Misogynism among Christians

Here is a sample of extracts from Christian writers, old and new, giving their views on women: -

Saint Clement of Alexandria (died 220): ‘A woman, considering what her nature is, must be ashamed of it.’ (*Paedagogus*, 2.33, PG 8.430; cited by Garry Wills, *Papal Sin*, p.109, n.19)

Tertullian (died 220): ‘The judgment of God upon the female sex endures even today, and with it inevitably their position of criminal at the bar of justice. Women are the gateway of the devil.’ And, ‘Do you [women] not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives on in this age: the guilt must of necessity live, too. *You* are the devils' gateway; *you* are the unsealer of that forbidden tree; *you* are the first deserter of the divine law; *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* so carelessly destroyed man, God's image. On account of *your* actions, even the Son of God had to die.’ (*On Women's Dress*, 1.1.2 (PL 1.1418), cited by Karen Armstrong, *A History of God. From Abraham to the Present: the 4000-year Quest for God*, Heinemann, London, 1993, p.145, and Garry Wills, *Papal Sin*, p.109, n.20)

Saint John Chrysostom (died 407): ‘Woman is a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a

necessary evil.’ (Homilies, 15) and, ‘Women do not have the intelligence to be priests.’ (*On the Priesthood*, 2.2, (PG 48.633), cited by Garry Wills, *Papal Sin*, p.108)

Saint Jerome (died 420): ‘Women are the gate of hell.’

Saint Augustine (died 430): ‘Women are not made in the image of God.’

"Augustine agreed; 'What is the difference,' he wrote to a friend, 'whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must be aware of in any woman'", (Karen Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p.145, quoting Letter 243.10.) ‘In fact Augustine is clearly puzzled that God should have made the female sex: “after all, if it was good company and conversation that Adam needed, it would have been much better arranged to have two men together as friends, not a man and a woman.” (Saint Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, {On the Literal Meaning of Genesis} 9.5.9, quoted by Armstrong, *op. cit.*, pp.145-146)

Pope Saint Gregory the Great (died 604): ‘Woman is slow in understanding and her unstable and naïve mind renders her by way of natural weakness to the necessity of a strong hand in her husband. Her “use” is two-fold: animal sex and motherhood.’

Saint John of Damascus (died 750): ‘Woman is a sick she-ass... a hideous tapeworm... the advance post of hell.’

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (died 1153): ‘There are two things which defile and ruin [male] religious: familiarity with women and daintiness in food.’

Saint Francis of Assisi (died 1226): ‘Avoiding contagion from association with women is, in accordance with Scripture, as easy as walking in a fire without having the soles of one’s feet burned.’ (Thomas of Celano, *Second Life* [of Saint Francis], second book, chap.78, section 112, in Marion A. Habig, *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, Franciscan Press, Quincy College, Illinois, USA p.455. The internal scripture reference is to Proverbs 6.28) This may have fed into the saying that, ‘What straw gains by fire is what a male religious gains by conversation with women.’ (Constitutions of the Order of Capuchin Friars Minor, {up to 1968}, n.238)

The idea that women should be kept at home is powerfully expressed by another Franciscan writer, Francisco de Osuna OFM, (died 1542), author of *The Third Spiritual Alphabet*, who wrote to a husband, ‘Since you see your wife going about visiting many churches, practising many devotions, and pretending to be a saint, lock the door; and if that isn’t sufficient, break her leg if she is young, for she can go to heaven lame from her own house without going around in search of these suspect forms of holiness. It is enough for a woman to hear a sermon and then put it into practice. If she desires

more, let a book be read to her while she spins, seated at her husband's side.' (*Norte de Estados*, Seville, 1531; cited by Kieran Kavanaugh in the Introduction to Volume II of *The Collected Works of Saint Teresa of Ávila*, ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington, DC, 1980, p.23)

Saint Albert the Great: 'Woman contains more liquid than man, and it is a property of liquid to take things up easily and to hold them poorly. [This is remarkably similar to the view of Tibetan Buddhism today.] Liquids are easily moved; hence women are inconstant and curious... Woman is a misbegotten man and has a faulty and defective nature in comparison with his. Therefore she is unsure in herself. What she herself cannot get she seeks to obtain through lying and diabolical deceptions. And so, to put it briefly, one must be on guard with every woman, as if she were a poisonous snake and the horned devil.' (*Commentary on Aristotle's "Animals,"* 15, ques. 11, cited by Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, Penguin Books, 1990, p.108.)

With all this weakness and inconstancy, how did women ever become martyrs? Saints Jerome, Ambrose, Basil and Gregory said they became honorary men. (Garry Wills, *Papal Sin*, p.120, n.25)

Saint Thomas Aquinas (died 1274): 'In terms of nature's own operation, a woman is inferior and a mistake. The agent cause that is in the male seed

tries to produce something complete in itself, a male in gender. But when a female is produced, this is because the agent cause is thwarted, either because of the unsuitability of the receiving matter [the mother] itself or because of some deforming interference, as from south winds that are too wet, as we read in [Aristotle's] *Animal Conception*'. (*Summa Theologiae*, I, ques.91, art. 1 ad 1, cited in Garry Wills, *Papal Sin*, p.107.)

'Since any supremacy of rank cannot be expressed in the female sex, which has the status of an inferior, that sex cannot receive ordination.' (*Summa Theologiae*, Supplement, q.39r; in Garry Wills, *Papal Sin*, p.107)

'Woman is an... incomplete being... a misbegotten male. It is unchallengeable that woman is destined to live under man's influence and has no authority from her Lord.' (from Saint Thomas, no ref.)

Saint Bonaventure: 'only the male was made in the image of God.' (*Commentary on the Sentences*, IV, distinction 25, article 2, question 1; in Wills, *Papal Sin*, p.120, n.12), and, 'women, as the successors to Eve through whom man fell, cannot be the agents of human salvation.' (*Commentary on the Sentences*, IV, distinction 25, article 2, question 2; in Wills, *Papal Sin*, p.120, n.13)

Pope John XXIII (died 1334): 'Woman is more bitter than death.' (From the Bull of canonization of Saint Louis, a Franciscan bishop)

Pope Saint Pius X, addressing the bishops of Italy on 29 July 1904, said, ‘In public meetings, never allow women to speak, however respectable or pious they may seem. If, on a specific occasion, bishops consider it opportune to permit a meeting of women by themselves, these may speak but only under the presidency and supervision of high ecclesiastical personalities.’

Protestant writers were no better: -

Martin Luther (died 1546): ‘Let them [women] bear children to death; they were created for that.’

John Knox (died 1572): -

‘... weake, sicke and impotent, foolishe, madde and phrenetike.... And such be al women, compared unto man in bearing of authoritie. For their sight... is but blindness, their strength, weakness; their counsel, foolishnes; and judgment, phrensie, if it be rightlie considered.’ (From *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*)

Such ideas suggest repressed sexual feelings which those writers sought to cope with by demonizing the feminine. By contrast, ‘every Jewish male knows that he was born incomplete, and that only by a union of the flesh with a woman can he achieve union with himself, with other people and with God.’ (Michel Benoît, *The Silence of Gethsemane*, Alma House, London, 2012,

p.31) If more of Jesus' followers had experienced adult human love we might not have had such nasty and destructive teaching as the above. Did they imagine that, if they loved no one, it meant they loved God? Did they include their mothers in their view of women?

It is worth asking from where these writers found their misogyny. One thing is clear: there is no basis for it in the teaching or actions of Jesus. Quite the contrary indeed, especially if one takes the context of the times into account. The gospel according to Saint Luke illustrates this well.

How could Saints Augustine and Bonaventure say that woman was not made in the image of God, in view of Genesis, 'God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them'? (1.27)

A likely source is Greek philosophy. Aristotle had written that a woman is a misbegotten man, and Saints Albert and Thomas Aquinas followed him in this. A modern feminist has said that the attitudes of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle towards women find their closest counterpart today in those of the Taliban in Afghanistan; the burqa is a minor example of it. The early Christian theologian, Tertullian, asked,

What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem? What between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians...  
Away with all projects for a 'Stoic,' a 'Platonic' or a



'dialectic' Christianity! After Christ Jesus we desire no subtle theories... (*De praescriptione Haereticorum*, 7)

The teaching of Aristotle still exerts substantial influence in the formation of the church's teaching on issues of human sexuality and relationships. Tertullian's question still awaits an answer.

But there is more to it than the Greek philosophers. The writer of 1 Timothy – generally believed not to have been Saint Paul, though it is usually attributed to him – did not help matters in stating,

A woman must receive instruction silently and under complete control.

I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man. She must be quiet.

For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

Further, Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and transgressed.

But she will be saved through motherhood, provided women persevere in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (2.11-15)

'She will be saved through motherhood' finds a nasty echo in the quotations from Pope Saint Gregory the Great and Martin Luther above.

There is remarkable parallelism between misogyny and anti-Semitism among Christians. Both are prejudices

– rocklike in their ignorant certitude, untroubled by contradictions and reactive to subtleties of any kind.

## **SAINTS CORNELIUS, Pope, and CYPRIAN, Bishop: 16 September**

The Roman Emperor Decius, who ruled from 249 to 251, persecuted Christians sporadically and locally, but, from early in 250, he ordered all citizens to sacrifice to the Roman gods in the presence of commissioners, or face death. Some Christians refused and were martyred, while others complied to save their lives.

This created a problem for the Christian community. One group, led by a Roman priest, Novatian, felt that those who had offered sacrifice had excluded themselves permanently from the church; the only way back for them was by re-baptism. Others, led by Cornelius and Cyprian, a bishop of Carthage, held that there was no such thing as re-baptism, but that, as long as people repented sincerely and did penance, they should be re-admitted to the community of faith, usually by the bishop. Cornelius was a priest of Rome, probably from a poor background, as he did not seem to know Greek, the language of the educated, but only Latin.

The Roman Christian community was without a bishop at this time, as the last pope, Saint Fabian (see 20 January), had died in the persecution of Decius on 20 January 250. Decius blocked the election of a successor, hoping that the leaderless community would die out, but then had to leave Rome for war against the Goths. In his absence, the community met to choose a successor. The favourite candidate, a priest called Moses, had died in

the persecution. Novatian hoped to be elected, but was not. Cornelius, against his own will, was chosen, probably in March 251. Cyprian, a friend of his, wrote that he was elected 'by the judgment of God and of Christ, by the testimony of most of the clergy, by the vote of the people, with the consent of aged priests and of good men.'

Novatian was angry, not only that he had not been elected bishop, but that someone who did not believe in re-baptism was. So he proclaimed himself pope in opposition to Cornelius, thereby dividing the church. He became more rigorous, saying that some sins could not be forgiven, such as murder, adultery, fornication or second marriage, and that only at the Last Judgment could such people be reconciled to God. Cornelius had the support of Cyprian, to whom he wrote at least two letters, and of most African and Eastern bishops. (North Africa was the biggest Christian centre at the time.) Cyprian's view was that the lapsed could be reconciled by the decision of the bishop. Novatian had the support only of a small number of Roman priests and laymen.

Cornelius convoked a synod of sixty bishops who declared him to be rightful pope; and it excommunicated Novatian and his following. It went on to declare that Christians who had offered sacrifice during the persecution could be re-admitted to Holy Communion after penance.

But the matter did not end there: Novatian had a supporter in the bishop of Antioch. So the synod's

decision was communicated to him and other bishops. In its letter, the synod stated that the church in Rome had 'forty six priests, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty two acolytes, and over one thousand five hundred widows and persons in distress.' From these numbers, it has been estimated that there may have been fifty thousand Christians in Rome at the time.

In June 251, Decius was killed in battle against the Goths. Gallus became emperor and immediately resumed the persecution. Cornelius was exiled to Civitavecchia near Rome and died there in June 253, some say by beheading, others as a result of hardship. He was buried in the cemetery of Callistus with the simple inscription *Cornelius martyr*. Novatian went off to found his own church, which ceased to exist some time in the sixth century.

**Cyprian**, born in North Africa about 210, was highly educated, and became a famous orator. He became a Christian about 246, and distributed his goods to the poor. He amazed everyone by taking a vow of chastity before baptism. Within two years he was ordained priest, and, against his will, was chosen as bishop of Carthage (near modern Tunis) in 248. During a plague there, he urged Christians to help everyone, including enemies and persecutors. He wrote a number of works, on the church, ministry, the sacraments, and on ascetical and pastoral matters. In one book, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, he wrote, 'He cannot have God for his father who does not have the church for his mother.'

(Chapter 6; PL 4.519) And in a letter, ‘You should know that the bishop is in the church, and the church is in the bishop, and that if anyone is not with the bishop he is not in the church.’ (*Letter* 66.7)

In a treatise on the *Our Father*, he stated, ‘When we call God “our Father” we ought to behave as children of God.’ (*On the Our Father*, 11; PL 4.526B)

He also wrote,

The people especially have the power of choosing worthy priests or refusing the unworthy. The practice of choosing a priest in the presence of the people and before the eyes of all, and requiring that he should be approved as fit and worthy by the general decision and testimony, evidently comes to us with divine authority.... Thus God shows that appointments to the priesthood should take place only with the cognizance of the people and in their presence, that, the people being at hand, the faults of the wicked may be proclaimed, the merits of the good proclaimed, and the appointment may be valid and regular, as having been tested by the vote and decision of all. Therefore, we should be careful to observe and keep the procedure we have received from the divine tradition and from the practice of the apostles, which is kept among us and in practically all the provinces: namely, that for the appointment of priests in due form, the neighbouring bishops of the same province should assemble with the people for whom a ruler is to be appointed, and the bishop be chosen in the presence of the people who have the fullest knowledge of the

manner of life of individuals and are acquainted with the behaviour of each from having lived with them. (*Letter 67.4-5*)

Cyprian felt that people who did not have a real commitment to the Christian faith were being admitted to the church and that this was creating scandal. When persecution came, many of them did not stand firm for the faith; they offered sacrifice to the Roman gods, while others bought forged documents certifying that they had done so. But he compromised his own position by going into hiding for three years during a persecution which began in 248. In 251, he was exiled by Emperor Valerian. Later, called to stand trial, he stood firm, saying that the people should have the witness of his martyrdom. He was executed on 14 September 258.

Contrary to the position of the church of Rome, he held that schismatics, that is, those who had cut themselves off from the church, could not validly confer the church's sacraments. He is the author of the saying, 'Outside the church there is no salvation.' (Letters 73.21; PL 3.1169)

The controversy about the re-admission of those who had denied the faith under persecution was contentious and difficult, but, in the long term, one beneficial side-effect was that it helped the Christian community to come to a better understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation.

## **SAINT ROBERT BELLARMINE: 17 September**

Robert Francis Romulus Bellarmine was born at Montepulciano, Italy, on 4 October 1542, the son of noble, but poor, parents. Pope Marcellus II was an uncle of his. He seems to have had exceptional intellectual ability, even as a child composing Italian and Latin hymns. One of them, on Saint Mary Magdalen, is used in the *Roman Breviary*.

At the age of eighteen, he entered the Jesuit novitiate, and went on to study, first at Padua University, then at Leuven in Flanders, where he made extensive study of the Fathers of the church and produced a Hebrew grammar. He was ordained there, and was appointed to teach and preach. He remained for seven years, but suffered poor health, so he returned to Italy in 1576, where Pope Gregory XIII appointed him to a new Jesuit university named after himself, the Gregorian. Robert taught there for thirteen years. He went to France on a diplomatic mission for the pope, and this was followed by several senior appointments in Rome.

In 1586, Robert quarrelled with Pope Sixtus V on the extent of papal authority in politics. He held that popes had only indirect authority in political matters, while the pope held that they have direct authority also. His writings on the subject came close to being placed on the *Index of Forbidden Books*.



Robert also rejected the doctrine of the divine right of kings. This held that monarchy was ordained by God and the king was his earthly representative. To disobey the king, therefore, was to disobey God. Along with many other Catholic post-Reformation theologians, Robert's view might be called political Quietism – God was not a politician, favouring one form of government over another. This scandalized Protestant reformers, who saw it as further evidence of how the church of Rome had lapsed from biblical principles.

In 1599, he was made Cardinal Prefect of the Roman Inquisition, and in this capacity was a judge at the trial of Giordano Bruno, agreeing with his being sentenced to death for heresy by being burned at the stake. (The tortures inflicted on him before his burning are horrifying.) Bruno was a Dominican who held some bizarre theories which seem to owe more to astrology than to theology – though they were hardly more so than those of his fellow Dominican and teacher of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Albert the Great.

Robert probably felt that, in sentencing Bruno, he was serving God and the Gospel. It is astonishing that someone who surely believed he was doing the work of Christ could use methods so clearly and firmly repudiated by Christ: -

When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them as Elijah did?'

But he turned and rebuked them,  
and said, 'You do not know what spirit you are of,  
for the Son of Man has not come to destroy the lives  
of human beings but to save them.' Then they went  
on to another village. (Luke 9.54-56)

How ironic that, in his capacity as head of the Roman Inquisition, Robert's task was to uphold Catholic doctrine! The best answer to bad theology, one might think, is good theology, not the burning of the theologian, but the church of his time did not see it that way.

In 1602, he was, in effect, demoted to be archbishop of Capua. There he worked to put into effect the reforming decrees of the Council of Trent.

On the instructions of Pope Paul V, Robert contacted Galileo to notify him that Rome was about to condemn Copernicus' teaching that the earth moves around the sun. That implied a condemnation of Galileo, too, as he held the same view. Robert himself was ambiguous on the topic, saying that it needed more research. He advised Galileo not to describe Copernicus' teaching as scientifically verified, since it was as yet an unproven hypothesis, and also that it would be better for him not to venture further with his theories as to how scripture should be interpreted. When Galileo complained of rumours that he had been forced to recant, Robert denied them, saying that he had simply been notified of the decree and informed that, as a consequence, the Copernican doctrine could not be 'defended or held' but

could be put forward as a hypothesis. The condemnation of Galileo by the Inquisition came twelve years after Robert's death.

(Galileo's ideas on the interpretation of scripture were, in fact, very similar to those propounded centuries later by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical on biblical studies, *Providentissimus Deus* of 1893, and by Pope Pius XII in his 1943 letter on the same topic, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, and also to those of Cardinal Cesare Baronius, head of the Vatican Library at the time, who coined the saying, 'The Bible teaches us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.')

Robert wrote works of theology on controversial issues of his day, such as his four-volume *Disputations*, setting out Catholic doctrine against the Protestant position, and also some devotional books for laypeople, such as *The Ascent of the Mind to God*, and *The Art of Dying Well*, and *The Seven Words on the Cross*. He was involved in the production of the revised edition of the Vulgate in 1592.

Throughout his life, Robert was generous to the poor and followed a simple, even, austere, life-style.

In his old age, Robert was made bishop of his home town, and spent four years there. He then retired to a Jesuit college in Rome, where he died on 17 September 1621, at the age of seventy-eight. He was canonized in 1930, and declared a doctor of the church the following year.

Bellarmino wrote as follows on marriage: -

The sacrament of matrimony may be considered in two ways: in the moment of its accomplishment, and in its permanence afterwards. This sacrament, in fact, is similar to the Eucharist, which, likewise, is a sacrament not only in the moment of its accomplishment, but also as long as it remains. For as long as husband and wife live, their fellowship is always the sacrament of Christ and the Church. (*On Controversies*, Tome III, On Matrimony, controversy 2, chapter 6)

## **SAINT JOSEPH OF CUPERTINO: 18 September**

Joseph was born in Apulia, Italy, in 1603. As a child he appeared to be mentally slow. He was nicknamed ‘the Gaper’ because he would stand gaping at things. His mother spoke of him as ‘a useless burden.’ As a young man, he joined the Capuchins but was dismissed because he was so scatter-brained. He would sometimes forget what he was doing, and, for example, drop plates of food because he had thought of something else. He said that having his religious habit taken from him was like having the skin pulled from his body.

As a young man he joined the Conventual branch of the Franciscan Order. The Conventual Franciscans took him and he seems to have found a welcome there. They accepted him as a candidate for the priesthood even though he could barely write and study was beyond him. When it came to an oral examination in scripture for the diaconate, he prayed that he would be asked to expound the only part of the Bible he knew anything about. It was the Gospel passage where a woman in the crowd called up to Jesus, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!’ (Luke 11.27-28) That was the very part, and the only part, the bishop asked him about!

Then came the examinations for the priesthood. Once again, he was clueless. To make matters worse, the other students were bright, intelligent men who had prepared well. Joseph was the sixth candidate out of six to be examined. But the bishop was so impressed by the high

standard of the first five that he concluded there was no need to examine the sixth! So Joseph got through without a question, and was ordained at the age of twenty-five.

Throughout his life as a friar Joseph had a great love for and devotion to the Eucharist. Early on, the miracles started. He healed the sick in such numbers that people came to the friary in crowds to heal him. The Roman Inquisition, the predecessor to the present Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, arrested and imprisoned him, because, they said, he was ‘distracting the faithful.’ While in the Inquisition’s prison, his guards went to his cell to call him for questioning, but could not find him. He was up at the ceiling, praying! He was acquitted.

Joseph liked to use images drawn from nature in his preaching. He said,

The grace of God is like the sun which shines on the trees and plants and gives light and colour to their leaves without in any way changing their nature. So the grace of God enlightens the person, beautifies us with virtues and making us glow with the fire of divine love.

He used to say, ‘Those who have charity are rich, even if they do not know it,’ and, ‘We should lift up our hearts and glorify the most high God with good and holy works.’

On one occasion the Spanish ambassador to Venice was travelling near Joseph's place of residence and detoured to see him. It happened that Joseph was in the chapel when the ambassador arrived. The guardian of the friary, escorting the ambassador into the chapel, couldn't find Joseph anywhere - until he thought of looking up. There was Joseph, high up above, just under the ceiling! The guardian became annoyed and ordered him to come down, which he did immediately. The ambassador, greatly impressed, wrote an account of the event.

Joseph's levitations seem to have been frequent. If he was walking across a field and saw some lambs, they would remind him of Jesus, the Lamb of God, and he would levitate.

Joseph's levitations express resonances between the material and the spiritual which challenge "common sense" principles such as that of non-contradiction, which states that, 'The same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect.' (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, edited and translated by W. D. Ross, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, England, 1966, 1005b 19-20.)

But consider the following: -

'In the micro-world it is necessary to affirm the presences of two identities of the same individual object at the same time. Furthermore, the "either-or" mode of thinking that applies so often to the world in which humans live, where two presences or identities of the

same object cannot be identified to be valid at the same time, is weakened as absolutely applicable to the world of human consciousness because of its inapplicability in the micro-world'. (Daniel Liderbach, *The Numinous Universe*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, New Jersey, USA, 1989, p.96)

Max Planck wrote, 'As a man who has devoted his whole life to the most clear-headed science, to the study of matter, I can say, as a result of my research about the atoms, this much: *there is no matter as such*. All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force which brings the particles of an atom to vibration and holds the most minute solar system of the atom together.... We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent Mind. This Mind is the matrix of all matter'. (Cited by Diarmuid Ó Murchú, *Quantum Theology: Spiritual Implications of the New Physics*, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1997, pp.102-103)

'Light therefore is a particle, that is to say, point-like, of no extension, but it is also a wave spread throughout space.' (Russell Stannard, *The God Experiment*, Faber and Faber, London, 1999, p.223)

Diarmuid Ó Murchú refers to '... Aspect's experiment in 1982, when two identical photons were emitted in opposite directions by a calcium atom; it was noted that if certain influences were brought to bear on one of the photons, then the second is also affected, although the latter may be on the other side of the moon!' (*Our World*



*in Transition: Making Sense of a Changing World*, Temple House Books, Sussex, England, 1992, p.74. For something similar, read Michael Reagan (editor), *The Hand of God: Thoughts and Images reflecting the Spirit of the Universe*, Templeton Foundation Press, Philadelphia and London, 1999, pp.21, 24)

Joseph died in 1663 at the age of sixty, a living expression of the truth that religion begins in wonder and culminates in thanksgiving. He was canonized by Pope Clement XIII in 1767.

## SAINT JANUARIUS: 19 September

Little is known of the life of Januarius. Later sources say he was born in Benevento, Italy, became bishop of Naples, and, along with six others, died a martyr's death by beheading during the persecution by the Emperor Diocletian, possibly on 19 September 305. He is the principal patron saint of Naples.

On three days each year – 19 September, 16 December and the Saturday before the first Sunday of May – thousands of people gather to witness the claimed liquefaction of two ampoules of his congealed blood. (It is one of several such alleged liquefactions of the blood of saints in the area – such as Saints Patricia, Pantaleon and John the Baptist.) The archbishop holds up before the congregation an ampoule said to contain the congealed blood and shakes it. When it liquefies, he places it on the high altar. During the day, priests take it in turns to hold up the ampoule for viewing by the people. If it fails to liquefy, people see it as a sign of bad times to come.

The first recorded reference to this “miracle of the blood” was in 1389. Saint Alphonsus Liguori, in his *Victories of the Martyrs*, claimed that Januarius' relics stopped or diverted flows of lava from Mount Vesuvius on their way to the city, and Blessed John Henry Newman publicly affirmed his belief in it, saying, ‘I think it impossible to withstand the evidence which is brought for the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius

at Naples and for the motion of the eyes in the pictures of the Madonna in the Papal States.’ (*Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England*, London, 1851, p. 410) The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche - not noted for his religious enthusiasm - writing in Genoa in 1882, in Book Four of *The Gay Science*, seemed to look on it with some favour.

Many doubts have been advanced about the liquefactions. Firstly, it has not been established that the contents of the ampoule are blood, and the archdiocese of Naples does not allow the ampoule to be opened. Secondly, it has been suggested that liquefaction results from the addition of a natural ingredient called molysite, volcanic in origin, possibly from the slopes of nearby Mount Vesuvius, which, on being mixed with viscous substances such as tomato ketchup, and shaken, produces liquefaction. This process has been called thixotropy.

The church has never adopted an official position as to the authenticity of this alleged miracle, and remains neutral in scientific investigations.

## **THE MARTYRS OF KOREA: 20 September**

Japan launched several invasions of Korea between 1592 and 1598. Some Koreans brought to Japan as prisoners converted to Christianity there and later returned to Korea with it.

The next wave of Christian presence in Korea was led by a group of Catholic laypeople in 1784. They had been diplomats at the Korean embassy in China, and learned the faith there from the Catholic community founded by the Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci, and his successors. They kept it alive by themselves for over fifty years, without Mass or sacraments, except for baptism and matrimony.

The first missionaries arrived in Korea in 1836. During four persecutions - in 1839, 1846, 1866, and 1867 – one hundred and three Koreans whose names are known to us were martyred, including Paul Chong Hasang, a layman. Ninety-two were lay people - forty-seven women and forty-five men - and eleven were priests. They were canonized in Korea by Pope John Paul II in 1984, the first canonization in modern church history to take place outside Rome. But, in less than a century, the Korean church had about 10,000 martyrs.

Andrew Kim Taegon came from the nobility. His parents were converts to the faith, and his father also became a martyr. Andrew was baptized at the age of fifteen, then travelled 2000 km to the nearest seminary in

Macao, China. He became the first Korean priest, and the first priest to die there for the faith.

‘The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians,’ is a saying from Tertullian. (*Apologeticum*, 50.12 in PL, 1.534) It is true of Korea, where the Christian faith has grown by leaps and bounds since the time of the martyrs. Today it numbers about thirty per cent of the population, but is fragmented among many denominations. It is a pity that, today, the Catholic church in Korea, founded by laypeople and sanctified by the blood of so many lay martyrs, both women and men, is highly clericalized, hierarchical and bureaucratic.

**SAINT MATTHEW THE EVANGELIST:**  
**21 September**

Matthew is mentioned in Matthew 9.9 and 10.3, and identified with Levi, a tax-collector. He is named among the Twelve in Mark 3.18, Luke 6.15, and Acts 1.13. He is called Levi, son of Alpheus, in Mark 2.14 and Luke 5.27. His name means *Gift of God*. He collected taxes from the Jewish people, probably for Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, where Matthew was from, and had an office in Capernaum. He would have been literate in Aramaic and Greek. Jewish tax collectors were treated as outcasts by their people. It was in this setting that Jesus called him to be one of his disciples. Afterwards, Matthew invited Jesus to his house for a meal. Seeing this, the Scribes and the Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners. This prompted him to answer, 'I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.' (Mark 2.17)

When he is mentioned in the New Testament, Matthew is sometimes associated with Thomas. The New Testament records that he was a witness to the resurrection and the ascension. Afterwards, the disciples withdrew to an upper room (Acts 1.10-14) in Jerusalem. They remained in and around Jerusalem proclaiming Jesus as the promised Messiah, but more than that as Son of God.

Later church fathers such as Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria claim that Matthew, for fifteen years,

preached the Gospel in Hebrew to the Jewish community in Judea. The Catholic and Orthodox churches hold that he died as a martyr. Muslims have a tradition that he and Andrew went to Ethiopia to preach the word of God.

Although the first – and traditionally the oldest – gospel is technically anonymous, it was traditionally held to have been written by Matthew. Origen (c.185-c.284) said that the Gospel was written by him in Hebrew near Jerusalem for Hebrew Christians and translated into Greek, but that the Greek copy was lost. Bishop Papias of Hierapolis, writing about 130, said, that ‘Matthew set down the words [of the Lord] in the Hebrew tongue and everyone interpreted them as best they could.’ (Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 3.39.16) Eusebius added that,

When Matthew, who had first preached among the Jews, decided also to reach out to other peoples, he wrote down the Gospel he preached in his mother tongue. He sought to put in writing, for those whom he was leaving, what they would be losing with his departure. (*History of the Church*, 3.24.6)

This Aramaic or Hebrew text is no longer extant; we have his Gospel only in Greek.

In recent times, the biblical scholar Raymond E. Brown held that ‘canonical Matthew was originally written in Greek by a non-eyewitness whose name is unknown to us, and who depended on sources like Mark and Q[uelle].’ (Raymond E. Brown, *Introduction to the*

*New Testament*, Anchor Bible, 1997, pp.210–211) (Q is an abbreviation for the German word, *Quelle*, a source; this is the name given by scripture scholars to a source, now lost, believed to have been used by the writers of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke.) Matthew may also have drawn on Paul, whose writings pre-date the Gospels. He wrote in the last third of the first century, perhaps between 80 and 90 AD. His gospel is structured in a way which suggests it was used for catechetical or liturgical purposes. It was probably written in Syria, maybe Antioch.

Matthew was a Jew writing primarily for a Jewish audience, so he does not explain Jewish practices as the other evangelists do. He presents Jesus as the Son of God, the one who fulfils the prophecies of the Old Testament in his person and his activities, but not in the minutiae. Matthew is troubled by Jewish rejection of Jesus. He was rejected by his own, but, in the predetermined plan of God, that opened the way for the Gentiles to come in. The new community of faith is universal.

The Torah and its observance, as interpreted by Jesus, is a major concern of Matthew's. It is subject to the primacy of love, and this means moving away from legalistic and mechanical views.

He presents the proclamation of the Reign of God as the central theme of the preaching of Jesus. The Reign (kingdom) of heaven (God) comes with Jesus. It is about God's plan for the world, the world as God would like it



to be. Matthew's is the Gospel of the Kingdom. The phrase "kingdom of heaven/God" occurs thirty-four times in it. But Jesus is a humble king, not the political king of then current messianic expectations; he is a servant who suffers and dies.

Matthew sees the risen Christ as present in the community of faith wherein salvation is available to all, and, in that community, Peter has a special place. Alone of the evangelists he uses the word church (ekklesia): 16.18; 18.17.

Matthew is more concerned to show what Jesus taught than to write an historically accurate biography. His Gospel has been described as 'popular history with its limitations, but faithful to its material.' 'The way in which allusions to scripture are somewhat artificially engineered is reminiscent of contemporary rabbinic exegesis.' (NCCHS, 710.b.3) An example of this might be the ways in which Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses.

For Matthew, even more than for Mark, Jesus is the Son of God.

## **SAINT PIO of PIETRELCINA: 23 September**

Saint Pio's birth name was Francesco Forgione. He was born, the second of six children, in Pietrelcina, a village near Benevento, Italy, on 25 May 1887, to Grazio Forgione and Giuseppa Di Nunzio, and was baptized there in the church of Saint Mary of the Angels.

As a child Francesco worked in the family's fields and tended sheep. His early education was erratic, but the family had a strong life of faith and devotion. He wanted to become a Capuchin, so his father emigrated to the United States to make enough money to pay for a better education for him. This made it possible for Francesco to be received into the Order, at Morcone, on 22 January 1903 while still only fifteen years of age. He was given the name of Pio, and went on to make final profession of vows on 27 January 1907.

Because of ill-health he was moved from one friary to another and was allowed to spend some of his time, and do some of his studies, at home; he may have suffered from tuberculosis. He ate very little, subsisting on a diet adequate only for an infant. However, despite these obstacles he was ordained priest in Benevento cathedral on 10 August 1910. For a time, he was allowed to remain in his own village, where he helped the parish priest as his health allowed.

It seems that, from about September 1910, he received on his body the stigmata (Greek *stigma*, pl. stigmata, a

sign, brand or dot), that is, the marks of the passion of Jesus in his hands, feet and side - but as yet invisibly. He spent a great deal of time in prayer, sometimes staying overnight in the church.

Then came World War I, which Italy entered on the side of France and Britain. Pio was conscripted for thirty months into the army medical corps. But, after serving only six months, he was discharged on medical grounds and told to await further orders. He returned to San Giovanni Rotondo where he had been appointed in 1916, but was later arrested there as a deserter. He pointed out that he had done as ordered: he had awaited further orders – which never came. He was acquitted and given an honourable discharge in March 1918, suffering from double pneumonia.

On 20 September 1918, the stigmata became visible and bled profusely. This led to much curiosity, many investigations, and physical and moral suffering for him. Between 1921 and 1939, he was confined to the grounds of the friary and ordered not to reply to letters. From 1931 to 1933, he was prohibited from saying Mass in the public church and from hearing confessions.

A medical examination showed that the wounds on his hands went through from one side to the other; there was no sign of infection, and they bled constantly without congealing. He experienced severe pain, saying, ‘The violence of my pain makes me mute and paralyzes me.’ He did not know what God wanted of him; he felt abandoned, and was hurt by being constantly under

suspicion. Eventually he found a way through; he said, ‘I know that the cross is the pledge of love. The cross is the down-payment for pardon. Love that is not nurtured and sustained by the cross is not true love. It soon turns to ashes.’

In later years, he underwent two operations in hospital which were entirely normal. Not long before his death, fifty years after receiving the stigmata, the wounds healed completely, leaving no scar tissue or evidence of anything unusual.

The people of the area were convinced that he was a saint and blocked efforts to remove him. When he was allowed to resume public ministry, he spent most of each day hearing confessions, drawing immense numbers of people from all over the world, often startling them by his insight into their lives. He was often blunt and brusque with people, within and without the confessional. A minor seminarian, aged fourteen, who asked him for help with meditation, was told, ‘What! You call yourself a seminarian but you can’t meditate! Go home and be a butcher; it’s all you’re fit for!’ The friars found it necessary to station one of their number in the church when Pio was hearing confessions to help and commiserate with the casualties of his work! But many who came to him, motivated perhaps only by curiosity, found themselves going to confession, perhaps for the first time in years, and experienced real spiritual cleansing and healing.

People claimed to have seen him thousands of kilometres away when he was in San Giovanni; they said he could heal at a distance. He was said to have given sight to a girl born without pupils, and to have reconstructed bone tissue destroyed in a road accident.

Pio experienced great struggles with Satan, the spirit of evil. He attributed his protection from the devil to the intercession of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

In 1940, he began work on building a large hospital in San Giovanni, which became known as the *House for the Relief of Suffering*; it was completed in 1956. Since someone had to be its owner, he was designated as such in civil law, and this required his being dispensed from his vow of poverty.

He had a sense of humour. Once, among the friars, he said, ‘There are three things that are completely pointless: washing a donkey’s face; pouring water into the sea and preaching to priests and religious.’

Pio said his last Mass at 5 a.m. on 22 September 1968. He then tried to go to the confessional as usual, but was unable. He died the following day, 23 September 1968, and his funeral was attended by a hundred thousand people. In 1999, he was declared blessed by Pope John Paul II who also canonized him on 16 June 2002.

## **SAINTS COSMAS and DAMIAN: 26 September**

There is no reliable historical information about Cosmas and Damian, though their cult was established by the fifth century. They are said to have been twin brothers, medical doctors, born in Cilicia in today's Turkey. They practiced their profession in the port of Adana, then in the Roman province of Syria. Accepting no payment for their services led to their being named *Anargyri*, the moneyless ones. It has been said that, by this, they attracted many to the Christian faith.

About 287, during the persecution under the Roman emperor, Diocletian, the two brothers were arrested and tortured. According to legend, they stayed true to their faith, enduring being hung on a cross, stoned, and shot by arrows before being beheaded. Their three younger brothers died with them.

Their most famous alleged miracle was the grafting of a leg from a recently deceased Ethiopian onto a patient's ulcerated leg; this was the subject of many paintings.

As early as the fourth century, churches dedicated to them were built in Jerusalem, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Pope Felix IV had one built in Rome in the 520's.

Their relics were buried in the city of Cyrrus in Syria. What are said to be their skulls are venerated in the convent of the Poor Clares in Madrid, where they have been since 1581, the gift of Maria, daughter of Emperor

Charles V. At least since 1413, another pair of their skulls (!) is stored in Saint Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. Two more skulls of theirs (!! ) are in Germany, one in Bremen, the other in the Jesuit church of Saint Michael in Munich. The Orthodox celebrates no less than three different sets of saints by the name of Cosmas and Damian, each with its own distinct feast day. This is evidence of the unreliability of the historical witness about them.

The martyr twins are invoked in the Roman Canon of the Mass, and in the Litany of the Saints. They are regarded as the patrons of doctors. Sir William Hamilton (1730–1803, the husband of Emma, Lady Hamilton, the mistress of Admiral Horatio Nelson) reported that, among the wax representations of body parts then presented as offerings to the two doctor saints at Isernia, near Naples, on their feast-day, those of the penis were the most common. They were venerated as patrons of 'young girls anxious for a husband, and married women desirous of children.'

## **SAINT VINCENT de PAUL: 27 September**

Vincent de Paul was born in Gascony, France, about 1581 to a family of peasant farmers. He had four brothers and two sisters. He studied for the priesthood in Spain and France, where he was influenced by the spirituality of Pierre Bérulle. He was ordained priest in 1600. In those early days he seems to have been a snob, ashamed of his humble origins, and ambitious to become a bishop, so that he cultivated connections with the powerful. France, at the time, was ravaged by one war after another, and most people suffered great poverty while a very few lived in immense wealth.

In 1605, while on a voyage from Marseille by boat, he was taken captive by Turkish pirates, who sold him into slavery in Tunis. After converting his owner to Christianity, Vincent escaped in 1607 and went to Rome. There he continued his studies until 1609, when he was sent back to France on a mission to King Henry IV; he served as chaplain to Queen Marguerite de Valois. For a while he was a parish priest, but, from 1612, he began to serve Count Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi, who managed the French king's galleys. He was spiritual director to Madame de Gondi, and, with her aid, began preaching missions to farmers on the Gondi estate. In 1622, he was appointed chaplain to the galleys and gave missions to the galley-slaves. It has been said that this work converted him, changing him from a clerical careerist to a man with a mission to serve.



In 1625, he founded the Congregation of the Mission, a society of missionary priests commonly known as the Vincentians or Lazarists. Their work was to preach to people in rural areas and to train priests. Among those who joined were significant members of the nobility, including Count de Gondi.

Saint Francis de Sales gave him responsibility for the Visitation nuns in Paris, and in that role he worked with Saint Jane Frances Fremiot de Chantal.

In 1633, with Saint Louise de Marillac, he founded the Daughters of Charity, who devoted themselves to the care of the sick and the poor; they were the first congregation of religious women without enclosure. He founded hospitals for the poor, one of which, the *Salpêtrière*, still functions. He also fought against Jansenism, which preached a rigorous and moralistic view of the Christian faith. Vincent was renowned for his compassion, humility, and generosity, and, for this reason, became known as the "Apostle of Charity."

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, a charitable organisation dedicated to the service of the poor, and drawing its inspiration from Vincent's life, was founded by French university students in 1833, and led by Blessed Frederic Ozanam. It is found today in 132 countries.

Vincent said,

Charity is a heavy burden to carry, heavier than the pot of soup and the basket of bread. It is not enough to give soup and bread; this the rich can do. You must be the servant of the poor, always smiling and good-humoured. The poor are your masters, very sensitive and exacting masters, as you will discover. And the uglier and dirtier they are, the more unjust and insulting, the more love you must give them. It is only for your love that the poor will forgive you the bread you give to them.

He showed practical good sense: -

Be careful to preserve your health. It is a trick of the devil, which he employs to deceive good souls, to incite them to do more than they are able, in order that they may no longer be able to do anything.

The service of the poor is to be preferred to all else, and to be performed without delay. If, at a time set aside for prayer, medicine or help has to be brought to some poor man, go and do what has to be done with an easy mind, offering it up to God as a prayer. Do not be put out by uneasiness or a sense of sin because of prayers interrupted by the service of the poor; for God is not neglected if prayers are put aside, when God's work is interrupted in order that another such work may be completed. (*Letter 2546*)

He also wrote, 'We should spend as much time in thanking God for his gifts as we did in asking for them.'

Vincent died on 27 September 1660, and was canonized in 1737. He has been described as not a profound or original thinker, but that his success was a result of natural talents and a tremendous amount of work. His piety was simple, non-mystical, Christ-centred and orientated towards action.

## **SAINT WENCESLAUS: 28 September**

Wenceslaus (Vaclav) was born about 907, the son of Bratislaus, a Christian duke of Bohemia in the present-day Czech Republic. His mother, Drahomíra, was the daughter of a pagan tribal chief; she was baptized at the time of her marriage. In 921, his father died, and he was brought up by his grandmother, Ludmila, who raised him as a Christian. A dispute between the fervently Christian regent and her nominally Christian daughter-in-law led to Ludmila being strangled on Drahomíra's orders.

Wenceslaus is described as being an intelligent man, well-educated for his time, and serious about his faith. He came to power at the age of eighteen, and exiled his mother. He invited Christian missionaries from Germany to come to his country. His reign was tumultuous, with wars against neighbouring rulers commonplace. Tradition holds that he was killed on 28 September 935 (or 929) at Alt-Bunzlau on the orders of his younger brother, Boleslav, who wished to become duke.

Wenceslas was considered a martyr immediately after his death, and his cult grew rapidly. He was seen as an example of a "righteous ruler," one who ruled justly and cared for the poor. He was posthumously given the title of king, because of the esteem in which he was held. He is remembered especially at Christmas because of the imaginative carol, 'Good King Wenceslaus looked out on the feast of Stephen,' published by John Mason Neale in 1853. Wenceslaus is patron of the Czech Republic.

## **SAINT LORENZO RUIZ: 28 September**

Lorenzo (Lawrence) Ruiz was born about 1600 in Manila, the Philippines, to a Chinese father and a Filipina mother, both of whom were Catholic. His father taught him Chinese, and his mother Tagalog, the main language of the country. As a boy, he served Mass, and joined a parish confraternity. He was educated by the Dominicans, and later took a job in the local church as a sacristan or clerk.

He married a woman called Rosaria, and they had two sons and a daughter. The family lead a peaceful and religious life until 1636, when Lorenzo was falsely accused of killing a Spaniard. This was all the more serious as the Spaniards were the colonial power at the time. (In fact, the name of the country derives from Philip, the king of Spain.) Lorenzo fled, and sought refuge on board a ship carrying Dominican missionaries to Japan.

By the time he arrived there, a persecution of Christians was underway. The missionaries were imprisoned, and after two years, transferred to Nagasaki to face trial by torture. On 27 September 1637, Lorenzo, although given many opportunities either to renounce his faith or to leave Japan, refused to do either. He and his companions, Japanese and foreign, were tortured to death. His body was cremated and his ashes thrown in the sea. In all, sixteen people gave their lives for the faith in Japan between 1633 and 1637.

Lorenzo was declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II in Manila, the first such ceremony to take place outside Rome. He was canonized in 1987, becoming the first canonized Filipino saint.

## ARCHANGELS MICHAEL, GABRIEL AND RAPHAEL: 29 September

The “el” at the end of many Hebrew names, e.g., Daniel, Emmanuel, Israel, Samuel, Nathaniel, Joel, Uriel etc., refers to Elohim, which means gods. References in the Bible to the presence of an angel are often an indirect way of implying the presence of God.

**Michael:** the name means one who is like God. In Daniel 10.13ff. and 12.1, he is seen, with Gabriel, as the protector of the Chosen People, while in Revelation 12.7-9 he fights a dragon, a symbol of evil. In Jude v.9, he fights Satan for possession of the body of Moses. In Christian tradition, Michael is seen as the protector of the church, and the one who escorts the souls of the dead to heaven. In art, he is represented as an angelic warrior, armed with helmet, sword, and shield (often the shield bears the Latin inscription: *Quis ut Deus*), standing over the dragon, which he sometimes pierces with a lance.

**Gabriel:** the name means the strength of God. He figures in Daniel 8 – 9 as an interpreter of visions. In the New Testament, he announces the conception of Saint John the Baptist in Luke 1.11-20, while in Luke 1.26-38, acting as God’s messenger, he asks Mary to agree to become the mother of the Son of the Most High. This role is in keeping with his messianic associations in the Hebrew Bible. He is not called an archangel in the Bible.

**Raphael:** the name means the healing of God. He is prominent in Tobit, where he is the guardian of a journey (5-6), a healer (6; 11.1-15), and expels demons (6.15-17; 8.1-3). In Tobit 12.15, he presents the prayers of the righteous to God and enters God's presence. He is mentioned also in apocryphal literature such as the Book of Enoch.

Six roles have been identified for angels in scripture: -

- they shield: Daniel 3.8; 12.1;
- they reveal God's message of salvation: Matthew 1.20;
- they heal: Tobit 3.17;
- they carry out God's judgments: Revelation 15.7-8;
- they escort souls at death: Luke 16.22;
- they praise God: Luke 2.13.

The names by which we know archangels are taken from their ministry. They are mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4.16. In addition to Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, there are Uriel, Sariel, Rumiell and Panchel.

Following rabbinic practice, one may answer the question, 'Do angels exist?' with another, 'Do you think we are the best God can do?'



## **SAINT JEROME: 30 September**

Jerome was born in Dalmatia, Croatia, around 347. Although initially skeptical of Christianity, he was eventually converted. He was not baptized until he was about twenty, when he went to Rome to study. There he learned Latin, and at least some Greek. As a student, he indulged himself sexually, but experienced great guilt afterwards. To ease his conscience, he would visit the tombs in the catacombs.

About 373, he went to Antioch in Syria, where he experienced a near fatal illness, and two of his companions died. During his illness, he had a vision that led him to devote himself to God. He went to the desert for about four years and lived among hermits, practising severe asceticism. Here also he began studying Hebrew. Returning to Antioch, he was ordained, apparently unwillingly, and on condition that he be allowed to continue his ascetic life. Soon afterward, he went to Constantinople to pursue the study of scripture under Gregory Nazianzen. He spent two years there, before going to Rome about 382, and working for Pope Damasus I as his secretary until 385.

It was in Rome that he undertook a revision of the Latin Bible, to be based on the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. He also updated the Psalter containing the Book of Psalms then in use in Rome. Translating from the Hebrew what became the Latin Vulgate Bible would take many years and be his most important

achievement. He also followed the historian Eusebius in writing biographies in his *On Illustrious Men*.

But in Rome, he made many enemies, seemingly because of the harshness of his judgments on priests and people alike, for what he considered their hedonistic lifestyle. Despite writing, 'Women are the gate of hell,' he found himself accused of having an improper relationship with a wealthy widow, Paula. As a result, he left Rome for good in 385, and returned to Antioch, along with the widow. After a tour of the Holy Land and Egypt, he spent the rest of his life from 386 in Bethlehem.

To these last thirty-four years of his life belong the most important of his works; his translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew text, his commentaries on scripture, his catalogue of Christian authors, and a treatise against Pelagianism. As a result of his writings against the latter, a body of its supporters broke into his monastery, set it on fire, and killed a deacon, forcing Jerome to seek safety elsewhere. It is recorded that he died near Bethlehem on 30 September 420.

Jerome was a scholar at a time when that statement implied a fluency in Greek. He knew some Hebrew when he began his project of translating the Bible into Latin, the language of the common people, but moved to Jerusalem to improve it. (Latin *vulgus*, the common people, hence the Vulgate translation.) Prior to this, all Latin translations of the Old Testament were based on

Greek, not Hebrew. Jerome's decision to use a Hebrew text instead of the Greek Septuagint went against the advice of most other Christians, including Saint Augustine, who thought that the Septuagint was inspired. Modern scholarship has cast doubts on the reliability of Jerome's knowledge of Hebrew.

Jerome produced a number of commentaries on Scripture, often aligning them closely with Jewish traditions of interpretations. Some of these have been criticized as hurried, and, as a result, superficial or arbitrary: for example, he authored a commentary on Saint Matthew's Gospel in two weeks.

Jerome is also known as a writer of history and biography. These borrowed from suspect sources, and are not regarded as reliable. In his many letters, he gives a vivid picture of his own mind, and of his times. Because there was no distinct line between personal documents and those meant for publication, we frequently find in his letters both confidential messages and treatises meant for others besides the one to whom he was writing. He was an irascible man, given to extremes; he used to grumble, 'There used to be real Christians once.' His theological writings throughout his life have a vehemently polemical character. He was intensely opinionated and vigorous in asserting his viewpoint.

After Saint Augustine, Jerome is the most voluminous writer in ancient Latin Christianity. The later resurgence of Hebrew studies within Christianity owes much to him.

Despite his limitations, Jerome is well regarded if only for the influence exercised by his Latin version of the Bible upon the subsequent ecclesiastical and theological development. In the Catholic Church, he is the patron saint of translators, librarians and encyclopaedists.

His love of the Bible is evident in sayings of his: -  
'Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ.'  
(*Commentary on Isaiah*, PL 24.17b)

'Love the Bible and wisdom will love you; love it and it will preserve you; honour it and it will embrace you.'  
(*Letter to Demetriades*, 130.20)

'Feed your mind daily with holy scripture.'  
(*Commentary on Titus* 3.9)

'Let sleep find you holding your Bible, and when your head nods let it be resting on the sacred page.'  
(*Letter to Eustochius*, 22.17.2)

And also, 'For those who love, nothing is hard, and no task is difficult if your desire is great.'

## SAINT THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX: 1 October

Thérèse Martin was born in Alençon, France, on 2 January 1873 into a middle-class bourgeois family of exceptional, if suffocating, piety. Several of her older sisters had joined the Carmelite convent and Thérèse wanted to follow them. After making a personal appeal to Pope Leo XIII during a family pilgrimage to Rome, she was admitted to the convent at the age of fifteen, and made her profession in 1890.

There she contracted what appears to have been tuberculosis and died on 30 September 1897 at the age of twenty-four. When, according to custom, one of her religious sisters was asked to send an account of her life to the other Carmelite houses, she protested that it was difficult to do: Thérèse, she said, had never done anything.

Yet, in a short time, largely through her autobiography, *Histoire d'une âme*, she became known, revered and loved throughout the world. On the surface her life in the convent had been conventional. Her real journey was within. Her life may be seen as having five special elements: -

First: *Her experience of the absence of God.* God's absence seemed more real to her than God's presence. She wrote, 'I had been sorely tried, and was on the verge of melancholy, being in such deep spiritual darkness that I even doubted God's love for me,' and, 'Sometimes... I

find it difficult to believe in the existence of anything except the clouds which limit my horizon.'

'I can't say that my thanksgivings after Communion have often brought with them any strong sense of devotion; indeed, I don't know that there's any moment at which I experienced so little.'

'I'd been going through a bad time spiritually in every way, even to the point of asking myself whether heaven really existed.'

'Don't think of me as buoyed up on a tide of spiritual consolation; my only consolation is to have none on this side of the grave.'

'Jesus.... allowed my soul to be overrun by an impenetrable darkness, which made the thought of heaven, hitherto so welcome, a subject of nothing but conflict and torment. And this trial was not to be a matter of a few days or a few weeks; it was to last until the moment when God should see fit to remove it.'

She felt as if the devil was saying to her, 'It's all a dream, this talk of a heavenly country.... and of a God who made it all, who is to be your possession in eternity! You really believe, do you, that the mist which hangs about you will clear away later on? All right, all right, go on longing for death! But death will make nonsense of your hopes; it will only mean a night darker than ever, the night of simple non-existence.'

She was tempted to suicide, and felt that, ‘A great wall reaches up to the sky and blots out the stars.’ When dying, she asked the sisters to remove a scissors from her bedside locker in case she used it to kill herself.

‘When I’m by myself... it’s a terrible thing to admit, but saying the rosary takes it out of me more than any hair-shirt would; I do say it so badly! Try as I will to force myself, I can’t meditate on the mysteries of the rosary; I just can’t fix my mind on them.’

‘Now, self-abandonment is my only guide, the only compass I have to steer by...’

‘What should I do without prayer and sacrifice? They are all the strength I’ve got, the irresistible weapons our Lord has granted me.’

But she was also able to say, ‘Ever since he began to let me have temptations against the virtue of faith, he has established the spirit of faith more firmly than ever in my heart...’

Second: *She gave significance to the insignificant.* She wrote, ‘Our Lord doesn’t ask for great achievements, only for self-surrender and for gratitude.’

‘I tried my best to do good on a small scale, having no opportunity to do it on a larger scale...’

‘Does God really ask no more of me than these unimportant little sacrifices I offer him, these desires to do something better? Is he really content with me as I am?’ Yes.

‘The only true glory, I soon learned to realize, is the glory that lasts for ever; and, to win that, you don't need to perform any dazzling exploits - you want to live a hidden life, doing good in such an unobtrusive way that you don't even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.’

‘Obviously there's nothing great to be made of me, so it must be possible for me to aspire to sanctity in spite of my insignificance. I've got to take myself just as I am, with all my imperfections...’

‘I am a helpless little nonentity - that and nothing else.’

‘Almighty God has done great things in me, and the greatest of all is to make me conscious of my own littleness, my own incapacity.’

‘My mind is continually haunted by the thought of what I really am.’

‘Complicated methods of prayer are all very well, but they're not meant for simple souls like me.’

‘For me, prayer means launching out of the heart towards God; it means lifting up one's eyes, quite simply, to heaven, a cry of grateful love, from the crest



of joy or the trough of despair. It's a vast, supernatural force which opens out my heart, and binds me close to Jesus.'

'Resign yourself to stumbling at every step, even to falling; love your powerlessness,' and again, 'What a grace when in the morning I feel no courage, no strength to practise virtue.'

Thérèse has aptly been described as an imperfectionist. She was content to be imperfect, knowing that she was loved unconditionally. That was her 'Little Way.'

Third: *Her appreciation of the meaning of suffering developed.* 'Thérèse of Lisieux began by seeing suffering as an inevitable ingredient of human life. She progressed to looking at it as a condition of following Jesus; then as a redemptive force and, finally, as a way of loving him who loved us first.' (From Vincent O'Hara ODC)

She wrote, 'My God, I choose the whole lot. No point in becoming a saint by halves. I'm not afraid of suffering for your sake; the only thing I'm afraid of is clinging to my own will. Take it. I want the whole lot, everything whatsoever that is your will for me'. 'Suffering opened her arms to me and I threw myself into them lovingly enough.... The more suffering came my way, the more strongly did suffering attract me.'

'Suffering is real happiness to me.'

Fourth: *Her conversion was a real turning point.*

In her early years she was childish, self-centred, spoilt, snobbish, neurotic, and hysterical. Her mother described her as thoughtless and stubborn.

‘Really, in those days I could make a tragedy of anything. It's so different now, when by God's grace, I never let myself be depressed by the troubles of the moment.’

‘This daring ambition of aspiring to great sanctity has never left me. I don't rely on my own merits, because I haven't any: I put all my confidence in him who is virtue, who is holiness itself. My feeble efforts are all he wants; he can lift me up to his side and, by clothing me with his own boundless merits, makes a saint of me. I didn't realize, then, how much suffering it had got to cost, this road to sanctity; but God lost no time in assuring me of that, by sending me the trials I have been telling you about.’

‘God has given me one grace - I'm not afraid of a fight; I have to do my duty, come what may.’

‘Charity found its way into my heart, calling on me to forget myself and try to bring happiness to others; and since then I've been as happy as the day is long.’

Fifth: *She grew to an awareness of the primacy of love.*

Thérèse teaches that love is the heart of the matter and that it is something that everyone can do. She wrote, ‘I

realized that, without love, nothing we do can be worth anything...’

‘Jesus, my Love’ – ‘I’ve found my vocation, and my vocation is love. I had discovered where it is that I belong in the Church, the place God has appointed for me. To be nothing else than love, deep down in the heart of the Church. That is to be everything at once - my dream wasn’t a dream after all.’

‘It’s love I ask for, love is all the skill I have.’

‘I care for nothing, I want nothing, except to do what Jesus wants.’

‘The only thing I want badly now is to go on loving till I die of love.’

‘God’s will is to love, in and through me, all the people you tell me to love!’

On her death-bed, she said, ‘All I have is love... I say nothing... I just love him.’

She was realistic about living with others: ‘One sister attracts you; another sister - well, you’d go a long way round to avoid meeting her. Without knowing it, she is your persecutor. Good; then Jesus tells me this is the sister I’ve got to love, the sister I’ve got to pray for. Her behaviour, to be sure, suggests that she isn’t any too fond of me. Yes, but “What credit is it to you, if you love only those who love you?”’ She succeeded so well that a

sister, whom everyone in the community found it difficult to get on with, said to her, 'I wish you would tell me what it is about me that gets the right side of you. You've always got a smile for me whenever I see you.'

Her unspoken answer was, 'You discover that trying to do good to people without God's help is no easier than trying to make the sun shine at midnight.'

Reflecting on the birth of Jesus, she said, 'A God who became so small could only be mercy and love.'

(In October 2015, Thérèse's parents, Louis and Zélie Martin, were canonized by Pope Francis, the first married couple in the history of the church to be raised to the honours of the altar.)

## GUARDIAN ANGELS: 2 October

The idea of a *guardian* angel for each person is perhaps a way of saying that, to God, the individual matters, not just people in a mass. ‘In the eyes of God... all the billions that have lived, and now live, do not make a mob. God sees each one as an individual.’ (Søren Kierkegaard, *The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard*, edited by Peter Rhode, Citadel Press, New York, 1960, s.127.) Saint Jerome wrote, ‘How great is the dignity of the soul, since each one has, from birth, an angel commissioned to guard it.’

In the Old Testament, God says to Moses, ‘My angel shall go in front of you.’ (Exodus 32.34) In Tobias (5-6), an angel is assigned to him as his guardian.

And there are similar thoughts in the psalms: -

‘For you has he commanded his angels to keep you in all your ways’ (Psalm 91.11);

‘The angel of the Lord is encamped around those who revere him to rescue them’ (Psalm 33.8);

and the psalmist prays for deliverance from enemies, saying, ‘Let God’s angel scatter them.’ (Psalm 34.5)

‘In the presence of the angels I will praise you, my God.’ (Psalm 137.1)

In Daniel 10-12, an angel comes to protect him, to tell him not to be afraid (10.12, 19), and to rest (12.13). There is also the prayer, ‘Angels of the Lord, bless the

Lord; praise and exalt him above all for ever.’ (Daniel 3.58) Ecclesiasticus 17.17 appears to speak of guardian angels of nations: ‘Over each nation he has set a governor,’ and Deuteronomy 32.8 similarly.

In the New Testament, angels are the intermediaries between God and people. Jesus said, ‘See that you despise not one of these little ones: for I say to you, that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.’ (Matthew 18.10)

Other New Testament examples are the angel who helped Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22.43), and the angel who delivered Saint Peter from prison. (Acts 5.19-20) Hebrews 1.14 states, ‘They are all spirits whose work is service, sent to help those who will be the heirs of salvation.’ The task of angels is to lead people to God. The funeral liturgy says, ‘May the angels lead you into paradise.’

Here are two prayers to guardian angels, the first Catholic, the second Orthodox: -

Angel of God, my guardian dear  
to whom God's love commits me here.  
Ever this day/night be at my side  
to light, to guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

O Angel of Christ, my holy Guardian and Protector of my soul and body, forgive me all my sins of today. Deliver me from all the snares of the enemy, that I may not anger God by any sin. Pray for me, sinful and

unworthy servant, that you may make me worthy of the kindness and mercy of the All-holy Trinity and the Mother of my Lord Jesus Christ, and of all the Saints. Amen.

## SAINT FRANCIS of ASSISI: 4 October

Francis was born John (Giovanni) Bernardone in Assisi, Italy, in 1181. His mother, Pica, had seven children. His father, Peter, a wealthy cloth merchant was away in France on business at the time, and, on his return, gave his son the pet-name of *Francesco* or *Francis*, meaning *the Frenchman*. Francis grew up an outgoing man who liked parties and had lots of friends.

In 1201, Assisi went to war against the neighbouring town of Perugia. Aged twenty, Francis was full of excitement at the prospect of being a soldier. His father kitted him out with an expensive set of armour, but - very much in character - when he met a poor knight dressed shabbily, he gave him his new armour but went to war anyway. Assisi was defeated, Francis was captured and spent a year in prison, there probably contracting the tuberculosis which ended his life at forty-four. A few years later, when he was about to venture on another war, he had a dream, in which he heard a voice asking, 'Francis, which is better: to serve the master or the servant?' The answer was obvious: the master, of course. This made him ask whom he was really serving.

Then, one day, as he was riding on the plain near Assisi, day-dreaming as he went along, his horse stopped suddenly and he saw a leper standing in front of him. He was repelled by lepers, afraid of contracting the disease. He hesitated but then, on impulse, jumped from the



horse, ran forward and embraced the leper. He later wrote of this in his *Testament*,

It seemed to me too bitter a thing to see lepers, but the Lord himself led me among them, and I showed compassion to them, and, when I left them, what before seemed bitter was changed for me into sweetness of soul and body.

It was another turning-point.

He began to lose interest in parties, and got into trouble with his father for giving away money and cloth from the family shop to the poor. He took to going out into the countryside to pray. One day, in the dilapidated church of San Damiano, he felt that Jesus had spoken to him from the crucifix, saying, 'Francis, see my church, how it is falling into ruins.' Francis straightaway began collecting stones and set about repairing the walls. Some of his friends came to help him.

At Mass one day in 1209, he heard the Gospel (Matthew 10.7-10) in which Jesus called his followers to go out and proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven, taking nothing with them, nor even a walking stick or shoes for the road. He said in his heart, 'This is what I have longed for; this I desire with all my heart.' He continued working on the church, but began also caring for lepers, going through the streets of Assisi preaching the Gospel, and inviting people to repentance. This evoked ridicule from most of his friends, and his family was embarrassed; but he persevered. When some suggested

that maybe he was falling in love, he answered that he was, and the love of his life was Lady Poverty. One day, he sold some cloth from the shop and brought the money to the priest to help with the church reconstruction. The priest refused to accept it, because of how Francis came to have it. His father came, took back the money, and ordered Francis home. This led to a confrontation between father and son, and their case was heard before the bishop. Francis took the situation by storm when he stripped naked in front of the crowd, saying, 'Until now I have called Peter Bernardone my father. From now on, I say "Our Father" who art in heaven.' The bishop, Guido, gave him a cast-off tunic belonging to his gardener, and it became his religious "habit."

Francis went to live at the church, and some of his friends came to see him; a few stayed. Given an introduction by Bishop Guido he went to Rome in 1209 to ask the pope for approval of his way of life. Some cardinals were wary; they saw this simple, unstructured life of poverty as asking too much of human nature. Why not join a Benedictine monastery? There was one there already in Assisi. But Cardinal John of Saint Paul supported Francis, arguing that the cardinals could not say that it was too difficult to live according to the Gospel without being guilty of blasphemy. The pope, Innocent III, had had a dream in which he saw the basilica of Saint John Lateran, his cathedral church, collapsing. Then, as it was about to fall, an insignificant looking man had come forward and propped it up. When Francis arrived, Innocent believed it was he whom he had seen in the dream, so he gave Francis and his

companions provisional oral approval for their form of life.

Francis called his companions Lesser Brothers, or Friars (Latin, *frater*; French, *frère*) Minor. They lived at a tiny church which they had restored, Saint Mary of the Angels. Their mission was to live according to the Gospel, and to preach it. Francis had great love for the Eucharist, though he never became a priest, only reluctantly accepting the diaconate.

In 1219, he went to Egypt in an attempt to convert the Sultan and thereby end the Crusade. Melek el Kamel received him cordially, declined to convert, and returned Francis to the Crusader lines with a gift of a basket of fresh fruit.

Francis' followers grew in number and spread rapidly, probably arriving in Ireland in his lifetime. This brought many problems which Francis felt unable to cope with. He was going blind, his health was failing, he was disappointed by the direction the friars were taking, and felt that they no longer listened to him. He wasn't an organizer, so, having secured definitive approval from the pope for his Rule of life, he gradually withdrew from the leadership of the Order.

He still had flashes of inspiration. At Christmas 1223, using live animals, he set up the first Christmas crib, something which has since become universal in Catholic churches. He founded what came to be called the Secular Franciscan Order, (also known as the Third Order of

Saint Francis), a community of lay men and women, who would follow the Gospel in simplicity while living an ordinary working and married life. He had earlier, with Clare of Assisi, founded a community of contemplative sisters who came to be known as the Poor Clares. Near the end of his life, while alone in a mouse-infested hut, almost blind, more or less abandoned by his brothers, he composed the *Canticle of the Sun*, one of the most joyous poems ever written, celebrating creation by God. He had great love for all creation, calling even inanimate things his brothers and sisters: Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Fire and Sister Water. His prayers are characterized by joyful praise of God the Father.

About 17 September 1224, on Mount La Verna, after an extended period of prayer with his companion, Brother Leo, Francis received in his body the marks of the passion of Christ, the five wounds made in his hands, feet and side, with “nails” of flesh in the feet. He is the first known person to have received these stigmata. Not very long after, having listened to the passion according to Saint John being read, Francis died after sunset on the evening of 3 October 1226, while singing Psalm 141, ‘With all my voice I cry to the Lord....’

He was canonized in 1228. He is one of the most venerated religious figures in history. At present, there are about a hundred and sixty biographies of him in print in English. He is patron saint of Italy and of the environment. Pope Pius XI described him as ‘the saint who was most like Christ.’

It is disappointing to find in this most lovable of saints some of the wearisome foolishness so common among male saints regarding women. Francis' principal biographer quotes him as saying, 'Avoiding contagion from association with women is, in accordance with Scripture, as easy as walking in a fire without having the soles of one's feet burned.' (Thomas of Celano, Second Life [of Saint Francis], second book, chap.78, section 112, in Marion A. Habig, *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, Franciscan Press, Quincy College, Illinois, USA, p.455. The internal reference to scripture is to Proverbs 6.28.)

Here is Saint Francis' Canticle of the Sun: -

Most high, all-powerful, all good Lord!  
All praise is yours, all glory, all honour and all blessing.  
To you alone, Most High, do they belong.  
No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made, and first my lord Brother Sun who brings the day; and light you give us through him.  
How beautiful he is, how radiant in all his splendour!  
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars; in the heavens you have made them, bright and precious and fair.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, both fair and stormy, all the weather's moods, by which you cherish all that you have made.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Water, so useful, lowly, precious and pure.  
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you brighten up the night.  
How beautiful he is, how gay, full of power and strength.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our mother, who feeds us in her sovereignty, and produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through those who grant pardon for love of you; through those who endure sickness and trial. Happy those who endure in peace; by you, Most High, they will be crowned.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Happy those she finds doing your will! The second death can do no harm to them.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks, and serve him with great humility.

Here is a selection of his sayings: -

‘Everyone who comes to the brothers, friend or foe, rogue or robber, must be made welcome.’

‘What a man is before God, that he is and no more.’

‘Blessed is that friar who loves and respects his brother as much when he is absent as when he is present and who would not say anything behind his back that he could not say charitably to his face.’

‘Who curses a poor man does injury to Christ, whose image he wears, the image of him who made himself poor for us in the world.’

‘It seems to me that I am the greatest of sinners, for if God had treated any criminal with such great mercy, he would have been ten times more spiritual than I.’

‘Greatly to be loved is his love, who loved us so greatly.’

An early biographer said of him: -

‘Walking, sitting, eating or drinking, he was always intent upon prayer.’

‘All his attention and affection he directed with his whole being to the one thing which he was asking of the Lord, not so much praying as becoming himself a prayer.’

‘He accepted death singing,’ and said to it, ‘Welcome, my Sister Death.’

‘His whole life followed the way of the Cross; it held no attraction except that of the Cross; it proclaimed nothing but the glory of the Cross.’

‘He seemed to have a mother's tenderness in caring for the sufferings of those in misery.’

‘Creation, which obeys its Author so well, was completely submissive to Francis who worshipped the Creator perfectly, and obeyed him without hesitation.’

‘He spoke of peace at the beginning and end of all his sermons, and peace was his greeting which he had for everyone.’

‘He seemed to people to be a saint with a smiling face.’



## **SAINT BRUNO: 6 October**

Bruno was born in Cologne, Germany, about the year 1030. He became a diocesan priest, a teacher, and chancellor of the diocese of Reims at a time of violence and decadence in the church and civil society. When he and other priests voted for the suspension of a bishop, Manasses, whose lifestyle was unchristian, the latter responded by hiring a gang to seize their goods and pull down their houses. These events precipitated in Bruno a long-felt desire for a change in his life.

At the age of about fifty-five, helped by Saint Robert of Molesme, the founder of Citeaux, and along with a few like-minded companions, Bruno embarked on a new way of life. At Chartreuse, near Grenoble in France, they built a retreat where they lived in isolation and poverty, occupied with prayer, study and manual work. The purpose of this was to grow into closer union with God. Their retreat gradually developed into the order known today as the Carthusians – from the French word Chartreuse. They followed a rule of life like that of the early monks of Egypt, combining both community life and the eremitical life. But Bruno was not allowed to remain there for long.

In 1088, a former pupil of his, Eudes of Châtillon, became Pope Urban II. He wished to continue the reforming work of his predecessor, Gregory VII, and, two years later, asked Bruno to come to Rome as his adviser. Bruno went there but worked in the background,

so that little is known of what he did. However, the pope, and Bruno, soon had to evacuate Rome and head south to escape an invasion by the German emperor, Henry IV, who had come with his chosen anti-pope in tow.

Asked by the pope to become bishop of Reggio Calabria, Bruno expressed his wish to return to the solitary life, because he had taken a vow to renounce ordinary affairs and to lead instead a life of prayer. But Pope Urban insisted that he stay near Rome, so Bruno and some companions went to the diocese of Squillace in Calabria to a small forested high valley, where they constructed a wooden chapel and huts at La Torre. Bruno had ten years there of relatively uninterrupted prayer, work and study. He had a reputation as a learned and holy man, writings commentaries on the Psalms and the letters of Saint Paul. He counselled people by letter, writing to one, 'I rejoice in your growth in virtue, but I lament and am ashamed that I myself lie inert and dead in the filth of my sins.' Near the turn of the new century, his associates died one by one, beginning with Pope Urban in 1099.

Bruno's desire had been to leave the world behind, but it kept claiming him. He did not want power, position, or possessions, but others sought to give them to him. However, he remained faithful to his vision of silence and contemplation as the way to union with God and won in the end. He died in 1101, and, though never formally canonized, was regarded immediately as a saint. The 2005 film *Into Great Silence* made the Carthusian way of life known to a wider audience.

## SAINT DENIS: 9 October

It is said that Denis (Dionysius in Latin), was sent from Italy to Gaul, (France), in the third century, to convert the French. There had been a small Christian community in Lutetia, France, but it had been almost annihilated by the Roman Emperor Decius. Denis, and two Christian companions, Rusticus and Eleutherius, settled near Paris just outside the Roman city.

It is said that Denis made many converts, arousing the anger of the pagan priests, or druids, and that this led to their deaths. The three were executed by beheading about 250 AD on the highest hill in Paris, which is likely to have been a druidic holy place, and their bodies dumped in the River Seine. This is popularly believed to have given the place its current name, Montmartre, derived from the Latin 'Hill of Martyrs.' But the name may also derive from Mons Martis, the Hill of Mars. The site where he died was marked by a small shrine that developed into the Basilica of Saint Denis, which later became the burial place of the kings of France. A successor church was erected by Abbot Fulrad some time after 750, and closely linked with the accession of the Carolingians to the Merovingian throne.

In time, *Saint Denis* became the war-cry of French armies, and he became patron of the country. The *oriflamme*, which became the standard of royalist France, was carved on his tomb. Not for the first or last time, a saint was co-opted to political agenda of war and

ambition in what came to be called the alliance of throne and altar (*le trône et l'autel*). At present, Saint Joan of Arc, who drove foreigners (the British) out of France, has been similarly co-opted to serve the agenda of the anti-immigrant National Front party in France.

Veneration of Denis spread beyond France, when, in 754, Pope Stephen II, who was French, brought it to Rome. Soon it spread across Europe. His name was confused with Dionysius the Areopagite, a disciple of Saint Paul, and also with a pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. This arose because of the *Areopagitica* written in 836 by Hilduin, abbot of Saint-Denis, at the request of King Louis the Pious. This was propaganda written to enhance the status of his abbey, and has no historical basis. Centuries later, Peter Abelard was one of those who questioned the identification of the two, and, in doing so, evoked such anger that he was forced to leave the abbey. There was a centuries-long dispute between the abbey of Saint Denis and Notre Dame Cathedral over which of them had the genuine relics of his head. The basilica of Saint Denis claims them today.

## A Note on Legend

‘Postman Pat ran over a cat.  
Did you ever see  
a cat as flat as that?’

Is that a poem? No; it’s doggerel. Take a piece of prose, chop it up into lines, and add a bit of rhyme and rhythm – is the result poetry? No. Prose and poetry are distinct modes of communication, different literary styles, each with its own dynamic, a dynamic which needs to be respected.

Similarly, legend is neither history nor biography. Are the stories of Finn MacCumhal and the Red Branch Knights factually accurate? Did the events described in the legends of *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*, *Parsifal*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Decameron*, *The Divine Comedy*, *Don Quixote*, *The Niebelungenlied* and *the Song of Roland* really take place? What about the mythologies of the Nordic countries, of Germany, Greece and Rome? Are they true?

Legend comes from the Latin *legenda* – things to be read. But the question is, ‘How are they to be read?’ Are they to be read literally – ‘Gimme the true facts, man,’ or allegorically? Legend points to mystery; without mystery, religion becomes mere moralism or politics.

Legends are not *historically* true - but there are truths in them. The legend of Finn is not history; it is his story.

And what of the legends of the saints? Did the fourth-century Saint Denis of France, executed by beheading, really pick up his severed head, tuck it under his arm, walk nine kilometres, and preach an impressive sermon on the way that converted many? And Saint Brigid of Kildare, who asked a pagan chief for land on which to build a hospital and was told, ‘Spread your cloak on the ground, and I will give you all the land it covers’ really see her cloak spread far and wide over plains and hills, to the discomfiture of the smart-ass chief and his grinning cronies? Did Saint Lawrence the deacon really joke with those who roasted him on a gridiron, ‘I think I’m well done on that side; turn me over and roast me on the other now’? Did Pope Saint Sylvester really slay a dragon and receive from Emperor Constantine a donation of the Western Empire? Did Saint Casimir of Poland really have two right hands? And did Saints Cosmas and Damian really have six heads between them? (As boys, adolescents and adults, perhaps?)

Did anyone ever believe, was anyone ever expected to believe, that their stories described actual events? It is said of the Irish writer, Jonathan Dean Swift, that he gave a copy of his *Gulliver’s Travels* to one of his colleagues. Some time later they met, and Swift asked him what he thought of it. The man beat around the bush uncomfortably for a while, before finally saying that, while he did not wish to be offensive, honesty compelled him to admit that he did not really believe it!

Legend is an alternative form of communication – vivid, imaginative, and memorable; it reaches beyond

the limitations of logic and reason, creating pictures in our heads. It does not present a package of information, but draws the hearer into the story, inviting further exploration. Is the story of Saint Denis a way of saying that even if you kill the Gospel messenger, you will not kill the Gospel message? After all, the Christian faith continued to spread in France after his death. Is the legend of Saint Brigid saying that love finds a way, even in the face of human pettiness? Or perhaps it suggests that even God likes to see a wiseacre get his comeuppance. And Lawrence? Does his legend suggest that humour may be a precious safety valve, even in the most desperate situations? Is the legend about Saint Sylvester slaying the dragon saying that he put an end to the monster of Arianism that threatened the integrity of the Christian faith?

At one point the English Puritans railed against plays, poetry and novels – ‘They’re all lies!’ In 1644, they even demolished Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre. And of course they were right: a novel, by definition, is not true. How can a novelist claim to know what someone was thinking as he walked along a road? Puritans burned tapestries and smashed stained glass windows, crucifixes and statues – all because they could not see beyond the written word; it was the only thing that counted. ‘Chill out!’ as the young people say; life is larger than logic.

In medieval times,

people understood the world around them through allegory, symbolism and parallels that might seem

far-fetched to us today. Medieval people were continually seeking lines of connection between the natural and the divine. The outward appearances of things were believed to cloak deeper, spiritual realities. (Jon M. Sweeney, *The Pope who Quit: a True Medieval Tale of Mystery, Death and Salvation*, Image Books, New York, 2012, p.77)

The Italian saying, ‘A lie well told is worth more than a stupid fact’ is akin to it. (Una bugia ben detta val più di un fatto stupido, quoted by Jon M. Sweeney, *op. cit.*, p.72)

But at what point does legend become mere spin, PR, or simple lying? Is there anything more than a semantic difference between those? If legend is presented as historical fact, then it is a lie. However, if it presented as legend, that is, as an imaginative way of presenting a truth, then it is legitimate. Hagiography was devotional in its purpose; it was not historical, nor meant to be.

It may be that we people of the present time – vastly superior as we are to those of former times, there being no historical vantage point more objective and bias-free than My Present Mood – consider legend to be beneath us, nonsense so childish as to be hardly fit even for a child. As legend nudges us to think outside the box, do we not lose something if we jettison it so smugly? Is it not possible that legend is not less than history but rather more, just as a parable is more than a story, a symbol more than a sign, a flag more than a piece of coloured cloth?



It is true that legend does not appeal to people of our time; indeed it puts us off. But perhaps that is our loss. Perhaps that represents something of the death of the child in us, the child for whom life is an adventure full of wonder, something with a new marvel round every corner, a playground of delight.

## **SAINT JOHN LEONARDI: 9 October**

John Leonardi was born in Tuscany, Italy, in 1541. As a young man he became a pharmacist before studying for the priesthood and being ordained in 1572.

His priority in parish work was the Christian formation of the young. In 1574, he founded the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine which focussed on the training of laypeople; it encouraged adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, frequent reception of the Eucharist, and devotion to the Virgin Mary.

John also founded a congregation called the Order of Clerics Regular of the Mother of God, which was approved by Pope Paul V in 1614. He moved to Rome, which, at that time, was blessed with many saints, among them Philip Neri of the Oratory, the Capuchin Felix of Cantalice, Camillus de Lellis - at least some of whom John knew. Philip regarded John as a man of strength of character and good judgment, and gave him the job of reforming several religious communities.

Along with Juan Luis Vivès, John founded in Rome the Seminary for the Propagation of the Faith, as part of the Counter-Reformation; it is now known as the Urban University. This also gave rise to the Vatican Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

In 1609, an epidemic of influenza struck Rome. John cared for those suffering from it, but contracted it

himself, and died on 9 October at the age of sixty-eight. The congregation he founded remained small but influential. He was canonized in 1938.

## **BLESSED JOHN HENRY NEWMAN: 9 October**

John Henry Newman was born in London in 1801, the eldest of a family of three sons and three daughters. At school, he was a great reader of the novels of Walter Scott. Aged 14, he read skeptical works by Thomas Paine, David Hume and perhaps Voltaire.

At the age of fifteen, Newman was converted to Christianity. He became an evangelical Calvinist and held their belief that the pope was Antichrist. Although to the end of his life Newman looked back on his conversion to evangelical Christianity in 1816 as the saving of his soul, he gradually outgrew his early Calvinism. As Eamon Duffy puts it,

He came to see Evangelicalism, with its emphasis on religious feeling and on the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone as a Trojan horse for an undogmatic religious individualism that ignored the Church's role in the transmission of revealed truth, and that must lead inexorably to subjectivism and skepticism. ("A Hero of the Church", *New York Times Review of Books*, 23 December 2010)

He went to Oxford University but was over-anxious about being successful, broke down during his exams, and received a poor result.

He was ordained an Anglican priest in 1825 and began as a parish curate, leading an active pastoral life. His

parish work helped him overcome his great shyness and led him further away from his evangelicalism into a greater appreciation of the role of the church in Christian faith. He also began his writing career. While local secretary of the Church Missionary Society, he circulated an anonymous letter suggesting a method by which churchmen might oust Nonconformists from control of the society. This resulted in his being dismissed from the post; and later he withdrew from the Bible Society, completing his move away from the Low Church group.

In 1832, Newman toured the Mediterranean. One night, while becalmed on an orange boat, he wrote the poem, *Lead, kindly light*. In a letter home he described Rome as ‘the most wonderful place on Earth,’ but the Catholic faith as ‘polytheistic, degrading and idolatrous.’

On returning home, Newman became deeply committed to the Oxford Movement, a development that sought to return the Church of England to many Catholic beliefs and forms of worship traditional in medieval times. Now a national figure, Newman saw Anglicanism as a middle way between Evangelicalism and the Catholic church. He started *Tracts for the Times*, a series, the aim of which was to secure for the Church of England a definite basis of doctrine and discipline. But later, after reading Nicholas Wiseman’s article in the *Dublin Review* on "The Anglican Claim," he said that ‘the theology of the *Via Media* was absolutely pulverized.’ (*Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, part 5.)

Some years later he published Tract 90, a detailed examination of the Thirty-Nine Articles, suggesting that their negations were not directed against the authorized creed of Catholics, but only against popular errors among them. This aroused great controversy and, at the request of the bishop of Oxford, he published no more *Tracts*. From there on, as he later described it, he was 'on his deathbed as regards membership with the Anglican Church.'

In 1842, Newman withdrew to Littlemore, near Oxford, and lived a semi-monastic life with a group of followers. The construction of this "Anglican monastery" attracted publicity, and much curiosity in Oxford, which Newman tried to downplay, but the nickname Newmanooth (from Maynooth College) was given to it. (Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part One 1829–1859*, 1987, pp.193–4) His time was largely devoted to the completion of an *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. In 1843, he published an anonymous retraction of all the hard things he had said about Rome. A little later, he preached his last Anglican sermon at Littlemore and then resigned his position.

Two years elapsed before Newman was received into the Catholic Church by Blessed Dominic Barberi, an Italian Passionist. The personal consequences for him of his conversion were great: he suffered broken relationships with family and friends. Some Protestants saw him as virtually a traitor; some Catholics viewed him with suspicion, murmuring darkly, 'Once a

Protestant, always a Protestant.’ He went to Rome, where he was ordained priest, and became a member of the Congregation of the Oratory, before returning to England in 1847. His Oratory parishioners were mainly factory workers, Irish immigrants, and tradespeople. He was a caring pastor, and their recorded reminiscences show that they held him in affection. Thereafter, except for four years in Ireland, he spent the next forty years of his life in seclusion at Edgbaston.

Anti-Catholicism had been central to British culture since the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation. Anti-Catholicism was ‘an integral part of what it meant to be a Victorian.’ (D.G., Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England*, Stanford, 1992, p.299) Popular Protestant feeling ran high at this time, partly because of the re-establishment of the Catholic hierarchy in England by Pope Pius IX in 1850. Led by *The Times* and *Punch*, the British press saw this as an attempt by the papacy to claim jurisdiction over England. This was dubbed the *Papal Aggression*. The Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, wrote a public letter denouncing this ‘attempt to impose a foreign yoke upon your minds and consciences.’ (E. R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, London, 1968) Russell's stirring up of anti-Catholicism led to a national outcry. This "No Popery" uproar led to violence, with Catholic priests and churches being attacked. Newman responded in 1851 with a series of lively and witty series called *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England*.

In 1854, at the request of the Irish Catholic bishops, Newman went to Dublin as rector of the newly established *Catholic University of Ireland*, now University College, Dublin. It was during this time that he founded there the Literary and Historical Society. He also published lectures entitled *The Idea of a University*, which set out his philosophy of education. This is considered to have become ‘the basis of a characteristic British belief that education should aim at producing generalists rather than narrow specialists, and that non-vocational subjects – in arts or pure science – could train the mind in ways applicable to a wide range of jobs.’ (Robert Anderson, "The 'Idea of a University' today" *History & Policy*, March 2010) Though influential in England, it evoked opposition in Ireland, with Archbishop Paul Cullen complaining to Rome that Newman was too liberal. The University as envisaged by Newman encountered too much opposition to prosper. (Surprisingly, perhaps, in view of his otherwise liberal views, Newman would not publicly condemn slavery as "intrinsically evil" on the grounds that it had been tolerated by Saint Paul. He said that it is ‘a condition of life ordained by God in the same sense that other conditions of life are.’ (John Noonan, 'A Church That Can and Cannot Change', 2005)

In 1862, he began to prepare autobiographical and other memoranda to vindicate his career. He published his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, a religious autobiography explaining what had led him into the Catholic Church.



In 1870, he published his *Grammar of Assent*, a work in which the case for religious belief is maintained by argument. In 1877, in the re-publication of his Anglican works, he added to them a preface in which he replied to anti-Catholic arguments of his own contained in the originals.

At the time of the First Vatican Council (1869–1870), Newman was uneasy about the formal definition of the doctrine of papal infallibility, believing that its timing was 'inopportune.' In a letter to his bishop, later published, he denounced what he called the "insolent and aggressive faction" in Rome that had promoted the definition. Newman gave no sign of disapproval when the doctrine was finally defined, but advocated including very few papal declarations within the scope of infallibility. (*Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*) Subsequently, answering the charge that he was not at ease in the Catholic Church, he affirmed that he had always believed in the doctrine, and had only feared the deterrent effect of its definition on conversions on account of acknowledged historical difficulties.

Pope Pius IX had mistrusted Newman, but, in 1879, Pope Leo XIII made him a cardinal, despite the fact that he was neither a bishop nor resident in Rome. Cardinal Manning of Westminster seems not to have wanted Newman to become a cardinal, and made no reply when the pope asked him about it. There had been whisperings in Rome that Newman was a Modernist, the bogey word of the time. Newman made two requests: that he not be consecrated a bishop, and that he might remain in

Birmingham. It seems he did not like Rome; after spending some time there in earlier years, he had expressed surprise at the low intellectual level among the cardinals. After becoming cardinal, Newman wrote virtually nothing for the rest of his years.

In his later years, he re-built old friendships with his Anglican colleagues, and Oxford University gave him an honorary position. He lived at the Birmingham Oratory until his death in 1890. When Pope Benedict XVI visited Britain in 2010 he declared Newman Blessed.

Richard Froude wrote that Newman's face was

remarkably like that of Julius Caesar.... I have often thought of the resemblance, and believed that it extended to the temperament. In both there was an original force of character which refused to be molded by circumstances, which was to make its own way, and become a power in the world; a clearness of intellectual perception, a disdain for conventionalities, a temper imperious and wilful, but along with it a most attaching gentleness, sweetness, singleness of heart and purpose. Both were formed by nature to command others, both had the faculty of attracting to themselves the passionate devotion of their friends and followers.... For hundreds of young men *Credo in Newmannum* was the veritable symbol of faith. (Cited in Wilfred Ward, *The Genius of Cardinal Newman*: Lecture 1)

Here are some extracts from his writings: -

‘In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.’

‘Growth is the only evidence of life.’

‘Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt.’  
(*Apologia pro Vita Sua*, Longman, London, 1878, p.239)

‘All bow down before wealth. Wealth is that to which the multitude of men pay an instinctive homage. They measure happiness by wealth; and by wealth they measure respectability... It is a homage resulting from a profound faith... that with wealth we may do all things. Wealth is one idol of the day and notoriety is a second... Notoriety, or the making of a noise in the world – it may be called “newspaper fame” – has come to be considered a great good in itself, and a ground of veneration.’  
 (“Saintliness the Standard of Christian Principle”, in *Discourses to Mixed Congregations*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1906, V, pp.89-90)

‘Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ.’ (“Letter to the Duke of Norfolk, V, in *Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, II, Longmans Green, London, 1885, p.248)

‘Conscience is a stern monitor, but... it has been superseded by a counterfeit, which the centuries prior to it never heard of, and could not have mistaken for it, if they had. It is the right of self-will.’

‘Christ, the sinless Son of God, might be living in the world now as our next-door neighbour and perhaps we not find it out.’

‘To take up the cross is no great action done once for all; it consists in the continual practice of small duties which are distasteful to us.’

‘The Catholic people, in the length and breadth of Christendom, were the obstinate champions of Catholic truth, and the bishops were not. Perhaps it was permitted, in order to impress upon the church the great evangelical lesson that, not the wise and powerful, but the obscure, the unlearned, and the weak constitute her real strength.’

‘If Christianity be a universal religion, suited not simply to one locality or period, but to all times and places, it cannot but vary in its relations and dealings with the world around it, that is, it will develop.’

‘The Christian will see that the true contemplation of his Saviour lies in his worldly business; that as Christ is seen in the poor, and in the persecuted, and in children, so is he seen in the employments which he puts upon his chosen, whatever they may be; that in attending to his own calling he will meet Christ; that if he neglect it, he will not on that account enjoy his presence at all the more, but that while performing it, he will see Christ revealed to his soul amid the ordinary actions of the day, as by a sort of sacrament.’

‘What then is it that we who profess religion lack? This: a willingness to be changed, a willingness to allow Almighty God to change us. We do not like to let go our old selves... But when a person comes to God to be saved, then the essence of true conversion is a surrender of oneself, an unreserved unconditional surrender.’

And here are some of his prayers: -

‘O Lord, support us all the day long of this difficult life, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at last forever.’

‘God, you have created me to do you some service. You have given some work to me which you have not given to another. I have my place in your plan: I may never know in this life what it is but I will know it in the next. Therefore, I trust you in all things: if I am sick, my sickness may serve you; if I am worried, my worries may serve you. You do nothing without purpose; you know what you are doing: you may take away my friends and put me among strangers; you may make me feel forgotten, you may allow my spirits to sink, you may hide my future from me, still, you know what you are doing, and I trust you, Lord. Amen.’

‘I come to you, Lord, not only because I am unhappy without you; not only because I feel I need you, but because your grace draws me on to seek you for your own sake, because you are so glorious and so beautiful.

I come in great fear, but in greater love. As the years pass by, and the heart closes up, and things become a burden, let me never lose this youthful, eager, pliable love of you. Make your grace supply the failure of nature. Do more for me the less I can do for myself.'

'My Lord and Saviour, support me in the hour of death with the strong arm of your sacraments and the freshness of your consolation. Let the absolving words be said over me, and the holy oil sign and seal me, and your own Body be my food, and your Blood my drink. Let Mary my Mother breathe on me and my guardian angel bring me peace; may my patron saint and my deceased parents smile on me; so that in them all, and through them all, I may receive the gift of perseverance, and die, as I wish to die, in your faith, in your church, in your service and in your love.'

## **POPE SAINT CALLISTUS I: 14 October**

Very little is known with certainty about this figure of the third-century Roman church. There is a tradition that Callistus was a slave, who, on obtaining his freedom, became a deacon in the church, ordained by Victor, the first African bishop of Rome. (In later years, the church prohibited the ordination to the priesthood of former slaves; this would have excluded Callistus.) As deacon, he was entrusted by Pope Zephyrinus with the care of burial chambers along the Appian Way. In the third century, nine bishops of Rome were buried there. The tombs were rediscovered in 1849, and are known today as the Cemetery of Saint Callistus; they are open to the public.

On Zephyrinus' death about 217, Callistus became bishop of Rome. He had to contend not only with false teaching, but also with slanders about himself. These claimed that, while a slave, he had misappropriated funds given as alms for the care of widows and orphans, and that he had fought in a synagogue with Jews while on a debt-collecting mission. The author of these charges, one Hippolytus, also accused him of Sabellianism. This was the teaching, deriving from a priest, Sabellius, that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are different modes or aspects of one God, as perceived by the believer, rather than three distinct personas in God Himself. But, in fact, it was none other than Callistus who had excommunicated Sabellius for heresy.

Callistus began to admit to the church from sects or schisms converts who had not done penance. This was controversial, and criticized by some of the faithful. About the year 222, he died for the faith, perhaps in a popular uprising, and was buried on the Via Aurelia. A shrine on the site of his martyrdom, attested to in the usually reliable mid-fourth-century *Depositio Martyrum*, had a church dedicated to his memory built on it in the eighth century. In the ninth century, Callistus' relics were transferred to the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere; they were excavated in 1960.



## SAINT TERESA OF ÁVILA: 15 October

Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada was born in 1515 in Ávila, Spain. Her paternal grandfather, Juan de Toledo, was a Jewish convert to Christianity and had been condemned by the Inquisition for allegedly returning to Judaism. Her father, Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda, bought a knighthood and assimilated into Christian society. Teresa's mother, Beatriz, was especially keen to raise her daughter as a pious Catholic. Teresa was fascinated by accounts of the lives of the saints and ran away from home at the age of seven with her brother Rodrigo to be martyred by Muslims. Having spotted them outside the city walls, her uncle stopped them as he was returning home.

Teresa joined her local Carmel in 1533. For over twenty years, she took life easy there, had servants (perhaps slaves) to attend on her, and spent much time receiving visitors and exchanging gossip about the goings-on in the town. She gave up mental prayer altogether for about a year and a half. (*Life*, 7.54)

But she changed. She suffered greatly from illness; early in her sickness, she experienced periods of religious ecstasy prompted perhaps by the devotional book, *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* by Francisco de Osuna. This work consisted of directions for examination of conscience and contemplation. She also used other works such as the *Treatise on Prayer and Meditation* of Saint Peter of Alcántara, and perhaps the

*Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius Loyola. She claimed that during her illness she went through stages in prayer up to perfect union with God. During these, she said she often experienced the 'blessing of tears.' She came to have a horror of sin, and of her helplessness in confronting it, together with an awareness of the necessity of subjection to God.

Around 1556, various friends - Job's comforters by the sound of things - suggested that her newfound knowledge was diabolical, not divine. She began to inflict various physical penances on herself. But her confessor, the Jesuit Saint Francis Borgia, re-assured her of the divine inspiration of her thoughts. Teresa believed that Jesus presented himself to her on Saint Peter's day in 1559 in bodily form, though invisible. These visions lasted almost uninterrupted for more than two years. She had another vision of an angel: -

I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the point there seemed to be a small fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my entrails. When he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan, yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it...

This language is evocative of the *Song of Songs* and is open to a bodily as well as a spiritual interpretation. Its memory served as an inspiration throughout her life, motivating her lifelong imitation of the life and suffering

of Jesus, epitomized in the motto associated with her: 'Lord, either let me suffer or let me die.'

Teresa has been described as 'a self-willed and hysterically unbalanced woman... [who] was entirely transformed by profound experiences.' (*The Collected Works of Saint Teresa of Avila*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh OCD and Otilio Rodriguez OCD, ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington DC, USA, 1980, p.13)

The incentive to give outward expression to her inward ideals was inspired by the Franciscan saint, Peter of Alcántara, who came to know her as founder, and also as her spiritual guide. She resolved to found a reformed Carmelite convent, correcting the laxity which she had lived in the Convent of the Incarnation among others. A wealthy woman friend supplied the funds. The poverty of the new convent aroused scandal among the citizens of Ávila, and the foundation was in danger of suppression. But powerful patrons, including the bishop, secured its future. Teresa worked for many years encouraging Jewish converts to follow the Christian faith.

In 1563, when Teresa moved to the new convent, she received papal sanction for her prime principle of absolute poverty and renunciation of property, which she wrote into the Constitutions of her Order. She wrote, 'It gives us great pleasure to find that we are in a house we can be thrown out of, for we remember how the Lord of the world didn't have any.' (*Foundations*, 20.12) Her

plan was the revival of the earlier, stricter rules, supplemented by the three “disciplines” or ceremonial flagellation prescribed for every week. For the first five years, Teresa remained in seclusion, engaged in writing.

In 1567, she received permission from the Carmelite general to establish new houses of her order. In doing so, she journeyed throughout Spain. She described this in her *Book of Foundations*. She wrote of one journey, ‘Since there was nowhere nearby to take a siesta, we took it under a bridge.’ (*Foundations*, 24.14) In four years, she established seven new convents. Teresa was authorized to set up two houses for men who wished to adopt the reforms, and she convinced John of the Cross to help with this. John, by his teaching and preaching, promoted the inner life of the new movement.

‘Teresa was not only a sound woman of business, but also a born intriguer.’ She wrote, ‘This delay seemed to me dangerous, and so I achieved my aims in another way...’ And, ‘I persuaded one of my brothers, by talking to him of the vanity of the world, to become a friar.’ ‘The house... belonged to my brother-in-law - ...it was he who purchased it in order to keep things secret.’ And, of another woman, she wrote, ‘She was a very good woman, and did what I said.’ And, ‘I took the opinions of a great many people, but found almost none who agreed with me.... I could not stop disputing with the scholars... I told them that, in view of the speed with which they changed their opinions, I preferred to stick to mine.’ (From Kavanaugh and Rodrigues above, pp.19, 32, 33, 266, 257 and 259 respectively)

In 1576, a series of persecutions began on the part of the older branch of the Carmelite order against Teresa and her reforms - not helped perhaps by knowledge of her Jewish background. The general chapter of the order forbade all further founding of convents, and ordered her to retire to one of her houses. She obeyed, and went to Toledo. Her friends and subordinates were subjected to greater trials. Saint John was imprisoned, and had the tonsure scraped from his head by confrères who used sea-shells.

After several years, Teresa's appeals to King Philip II secured relief. In 1579, the processes before the Inquisition against her were dropped, allowing the reform to continue. A letter of Pope Gregory XIII allowed a special provincial for the younger branch of the discalced nuns, and a royal rescript created a protective board of four assessors for the reform.

In twenty years she set up seventeen convents and as many men's houses, although relations with the friars were not always easy: 'At times I found them very tiring.' (*Foundations*, 23.12) Teresa combined in herself the roles of reformer, organizer, fund-raiser, and mystic.

Her final illness overtook her on one of her journeys. She died in 1582, just as Catholic nations were making the switch from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, which required the removal of October 5–14 from the calendar. She died either before midnight of October 4 or early on the morning of October 15, which is celebrated as her feast day. Her last words were: 'My Lord, it is

time to move on. Well then, may your will be done. O my Lord and my spouse, the hour that I have longed for has come. It is time to meet one another.’

Forty years after her death she was canonized by Pope Gregory XV. In 1617, the Cortes declared her patroness of Spain. In 1970, Pope Paul VI declared her, along with Saint Catherine of Siena, a Doctor of the Church, the first women to be accorded this honour. Teresa is revered as the Doctor of Prayer. Her works exerted a formative influence upon many theologians of the following centuries, such as Saint Francis of Sales.

Teresa is... the best of the mystical writers for those who do not accept or understand the relationship between God and man that is assumed by the mystics of all ages and countries. She is careful to explain everything she can, and she dwells longer on the early stages than the later.... (From Kavanaugh and Rodriguez above, p.14)

The kernel of Teresa's mystical thought throughout all her writings is the ascent of the soul to God in four stages (*Life*, chapters 10-22): -

The first, or ‘mental prayer’, is that of devout contemplation or concentration, the withdrawal of the soul from without and especially the devout observance of the passion of Christ and penitence. (*Life*, 11.20)

The second is the ‘prayer of quiet’, in which at least the human will is lost in that of God by virtue of a

charismatic, supernatural state given of God, while the other faculties, such as memory, reason, and imagination, are not yet secure from worldly distraction. While some distraction is due to outer performances such as repetition of prayers and writing down spiritual things, yet the prevailing state is one of quietude. (*Life*, 14.1)

The third, the ‘devotion of union,’ is not only a supernatural but an essentially ecstatic state. Here there is also absorption of the reason in God, and only the memory and imagination are left to ramble. This state is characterized by a blissful peace, a rest of at least the higher soul faculties, a conscious rapture in the love of God.

The fourth is the ‘devotion of ecstasy or rapture,’ a passive state, in which the consciousness of being in the body disappears. (See 2 Corinthians 12.2-3) Sense activity ceases; memory and imagination are absorbed in God or intoxicated. Body and spirit are in the throes of a sweet, happy pain, alternating between a fearful fiery glow, complete powerlessness and unconsciousness, interrupted sometimes by such an ecstatic flight that the body is literally lifted into space. This after half an hour is followed by a relaxation of a few hours in a swoon-like weakness, attended by a negation of all the faculties in the union with God. From this the subject awakens in tears; it is the climax of mystical experience, productive of the trance. Indeed, she was said to have been observed levitating during Mass on more than one occasion. (From the *Interior Castle*)

Teresa's writings stand among the most remarkable in the mystical literature of the church. Her books include her autobiography, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus*, *The Interior Castle*, and *The Way of Perfection*. These are an integral part of Spanish Renaissance literature as well as Christian mysticism, though her style is sometimes repetitive and confused, 'I don't know what I'm saying' (*The Interior Castle*, 6.5), and, 'It seems as if there are in my head... many little birds and whistling sounds...' (*The Interior Castle*, 4.1.10) [Elle avait des petites oiseaux dans sa tête.] Her position among writers on mystical theology is unique: she writes from personal experience which deep insight and analytical gifts enable her to explain clearly. She defined contemplative prayer as 'nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.' (*Life*, 8.5) She used metaphors to illustrate her ideas, such as that of prayer as watering a garden. A strange anomaly in her writings, as in those of her close associate, Saint John of the Cross, is the almost complete absence of reference to Mass or the sacraments.

Here are some sayings of hers: -

'It is love alone that gives worth to all things.'

'The soul's progress does not lie in thinking much but in loving much.' (*Foundations*, 5.2)

'I have run into some for whom the whole business [of prayer] lies in thinking. If they can keep their mind much



occupied in God, even though great effort is exerted, they at once think they are spiritual.’ (*Foundations*, 5.2)

‘I am not asking you to make many reflections, to produce grand and subtle considerations with your intellect, or to feel deep devotion: I only ask you to look at him. Who can prevent you from turning the eyes of your soul (but for an instant, if you can do no more) on our Lord?’

‘The Lord walks among the pots and pans helping you both interiorly and exteriorly.’ (*Foundations*, 5.8)

‘God deliver me from people so spiritual that they want to turn everything into perfect contemplation, no matter what.’ (*A Satirical Critique*, 7)

‘In prayer, there is nothing to be afraid of, but everything to hope for.’

‘You do more by occasionally repeating a single petition of the *Our Father* than by repeating the whole of it many times in a hurry and not thinking of what you are saying.’

‘The more holy someone is, the more cordial they should be with others.’

‘The soul that truly loves God loves all good, praises all good, joins itself to good people, helps and defends them...’

‘When I see people very anxious to know what sort of prayer they practise... I know how little they understand how to attain union with God, since they think it consists in such things as these. No. Our Lord expects works from us! If you see someone sick whom you can relieve, never fear losing your devotion; have compassion on her; if she is in pain, feel it as if it were your own.... This is the true union of our will with the will of God.... If you possess fraternal charity, I assure you that you will attain the union that I have described.’

‘Contemplation is a gift of God which is not necessary for salvation nor for earning our eternal reward, nor will anyone require you to possess it. She who is without it, yet follows the counsels I have given, will attain greater perfection. Rather she may gain more merit, as she has to work harder on her account.... Let her not be disheartened nor give up prayer, for sometimes our Lord comes very late.... For more than fourteen years I could not even meditate without a book. There are many people of this kind, and others cannot meditate even with the help of reading...’

She also wrote: -

‘Let nothing disturb you.

Let nothing make you afraid.

All things are passing.

God alone never changes.

Patience gains all things.

If you have God, you will lack nothing.

God alone suffices.’

(*Poems*, 9, On the efficacy of patience)

## **SAINT HEDWIG: 16 October**

Jadwiga, or Hedwig in English, the daughter of minor German nobility, was born in Silesia in 1174. Through her sister, Gertrude, she was an aunt of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary.

In those days, daughters of the nobility were seen as disposable goods to be marketed in the service of the dynasty. And so, at the age of twelve, Hedwig married Henry I, called the Bearded, son of the Duke of Silesia. But, as she grew, Hedwig took an increasingly prominent part in state affairs.

Henry and Hedwig had three girls and four boys. Of the latter, only one, Henry II, called the Pious, survived to adulthood, but was killed during the Mongol invasion in 1241. She and her husband lived pious lives, and she greatly helped the poor, building a hospital for them. According to legend, she went barefoot even in winter. When she was urged by the bishop of Wrocław to acquire shoes, she did, but carried them in her hands!

There were prolonged, violent quarrels among the nobility of the time about issues of power, position, and possessions. One can only feel sympathy for the people at the bottom of the heap who were manipulated or brow-beaten into killing or being killed in those wars.

Henry I died in 1238, and was buried at a Cistercian monastery of nuns, which he had established at Hedwig's

request. Hedwig moved into the monastery, which was led by her daughter Gertrude, and took the habit of an oblate, but without taking vows. She said, 'Fasting can overcome concupiscence, lift up the soul, confirm it in virtue and prepare a great reward for the Christian.' She is an example of someone who brought good out of a situation of stupidity, cruelty, and warfare. She fulfilled the teaching of Saint Paul, 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good.' (Romans 12.21)

Hedwig died at Trebnitz on 15 October 1243, and was buried with her husband. She was canonized by Pope Clement IV in 1267 at the suggestion of her grandson, the prince-archbishop of Salzburg. She is patron saint of Silesia, Poland and Berlin.

**SAINT MARGAREY MARY ALACOQUE:**  
**16 October**

Margaret Mary Alacoque was born on 22 July 1647 in a village in the diocese of Autun, France. From early childhood, she showed intense love for the Blessed Sacrament and preferred silence and prayer to play. It is said that after her first Communion at the age of nine, she practised severe bodily penances in secret until rheumatic fever confined her to bed for four years. At the end of this period, having made a vow to the Blessed Virgin to consecrate herself to religious life, she was instantly restored to health.

She had visions of Jesus, which she thought were a commonplace part of human experience, and continued to practise penances. Then, in response to a vision of Christ crucified, who reproached her for forgetfulness of him, saying that his Heart was filled with love for her due to her vow, she entered the Visitation convent at Paray-le-Monial in 1671, at the age of twenty-three.

In the convent, she was subjected to many trials to prove the genuineness of her vocation. She was given the religious habit on 25 August 1671, but not allowed to make her profession of vows on the same date of the following year, as would have been normal. Finally, she was admitted to profession on 6 November 1672, adding the name of Mary to her baptismal name of Margaret. She used to say, 'I need nothing but God and to lose myself in the heart of Jesus.'

She received several revelations of the Sacred Heart, the first on 27 December 1673, and the last eighteen months later. These revealed to her the form of the devotion, the main features being reception of Holy Communion on the first Friday of each month, Eucharistic adoration for an hour on Thursdays, and the celebration of the feast of the Sacred Heart. She said that in her vision she was instructed to spend an hour every Thursday night meditating on the sufferings of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. This Holy Hour practice became widespread among Catholics.

Initially discouraged in her efforts to follow the instruction she had received in her visions, Margaret Mary was eventually able to convince her superior of the authenticity of her visions. However, she was unable to convince a group of theologians of their validity, nor was she any more successful with some of the members of her community. She received the support of Saint Claude de la Colombière SJ, the community's confessor for a time, who believed the visions were genuine. In 1683, opposition in the community ended when a new superior was elected and named Margaret Mary her assistant. Margaret Mary later became novice mistress, saw the convent observe the feast of the Sacred Heart privately, beginning in 1686, and, two years later, a chapel built at Paray-le-Monial to honour the Sacred Heart.

Margaret Mary died on 17 October 1690. Thereafter, devotion to the Sacred Heart was fostered by the Jesuits, but became the subject of controversy within the church. It was not officially recognized until seventy-five years

after her death. Discussion of her own mission and qualities continued for years. All her actions, her revelations, her spiritual maxims, and her teaching on devotion to the Sacred Heart, were subjected to careful examination. In 1864, Pope Pius IX declared her Blessed. When her tomb was opened in 1830, two instantaneous cures were recorded as having taken place. Her incorrupt body rests under the altar in the chapel at Paray-le-Monial, and many blessings have been claimed by pilgrims attracted there from all parts of the world.

She was canonised by Pope Benedict XV in 1920. Pope Pius XII, in his 1928 encyclical *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, affirmed the church's position regarding the credibility of her visions by speaking of Jesus having 'manifested Himself' to her and having 'promised her that all those who rendered this honour to His Heart would be endowed with an abundance of heavenly graces.' Pope Pius XII wrote that, 'The principal idea of this cult or devotion is that we should ourselves make a return of love to the Divine Love.' (Encyclical letter, *Haurietis Aquas*, 1956, n.4), adding that, 'Some fail to distinguish between the essential nature of this cult and the various forms in which it finds expression.' (n.6) He also stated, 'The revelations of Saint Margaret Mary added nothing new to Catholic doctrine.' (n.52)

Margaret Mary's short devotional work, *Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, is popular among Catholics. She wrote: -

‘And He [Christ] showed me that it was His great desire of being loved by people and of withdrawing

them from the path of ruin that made Him form the design of manifesting His Heart to them, with all the treasures of love, of mercy, of grace, of sanctification and salvation which it contains, in order that those who desire to render Him and procure Him all the honour and love possible, might themselves be abundantly enriched with those divine treasures of which His heart is the source.’ (*Revelations of Our Lord to St. Mary Margaret Alacoque*)

Saint Albert the Great wrote, ‘Not the least gift of his [Jesus’] heart is the Eucharist, which he bestowed on us out of the immense charity of his heart.’ (*On the Eucharist*, 6.1.1)



## SAINT IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH: 17 October

Ignatius of Antioch, one of the Apostolic Fathers, was born sometime in the first century. Theodoret wrote that he was the second next bishop of Antioch after Saint Peter (*Dial. Immutab.*, I, iv, 33a) Apart from the name Ignatius, he also called himself Theophorus or *God Bearer*, and there is a tradition that he was one of the children that Jesus took in his arms and blessed. It is believed that, along with his friend Polycarp of Smyrna, he was a disciple of the apostle Saint John. Arrested by the Roman authorities, he died a martyr's death in Rome about 107, under the Emperor Trajan, but a purported eye-witness account of his death is regarded as a forgery.

En route to Rome, he wrote letters which are an example of early Christian theology. The seven letters regarded as authentic are those to the Ephesians, the Magnesians, the Trallians, the Romans, the Philadelphians, the Smyrnaeans, and to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. In his *Letter to the Romans*, he wrote,

From Syria even to Rome I fight with wild beasts,  
by land and sea, by night and by day, being bound  
amidst ten leopards, that is, a company of soldiers,  
who only grow worse when they are treated kindly.  
(n.5)

Topics addressed in the letters include the church, the sacraments, and the role of bishops.

By the fifth century, this authentic collection had been enlarged by spurious letters created to posthumously enlist Ignatius as an unwitting witness in the theological disputes of that time.

Ignatius' letters bore witness to the development of Christian theology, since the number of extant writings from this period of church history is very small. They bear signs of being written in haste and without a proper plan, such as run-on sentences and an unsystematic succession of thought. Ignatius is the earliest known Christian writer to emphasize loyalty to a single bishop in each city or diocese who is assisted by presbyters, and possibly elders and deacons. The role of the bishop was regarded as of special importance to ensure continuity in the faith, since eye-witnesses to the life of Jesus were nearly all dead; neither was there agreement as to what constituted the Bible. Earlier writings mention only *either* bishops *or* presbyters, and give the impression that there was usually more than one bishop per congregation. (Philippians 1.1) While the offices of bishop, presbyter and deacon appear apostolic in origin, the titles of 'bishop' and 'presbyter' could be used interchangeably: -

Take care to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and with the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and with the deacons, who are most dear to me, entrusted with the business of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father from the beginning and is at last made manifest. (*Letter to the Magnesians*, 6.1)

Ignatius is said to be the first known Christian writer to argue in favour of replacing the Sabbath with Sunday as the Lord's Day. (*Letter to the Magnesians*, 8.1, 9.1-2, 10.3)

He is also responsible for the first known use of the Greek word *katholikos*, meaning "universal", "complete" or "whole" to describe the church, writing,

Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful to baptize or to give communion without the consent of the bishop. On the other hand, whatever has his approval is pleasing to God. Thus, whatever is done will be safe and valid. (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, 8)

Ignatius used the word as one already current to describe the church. This has led many scholars to conclude that the term *Catholic* church may have already been used as early as the last quarter of the first century.

On the Eucharist, he wrote in his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*,

Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the place of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God.... They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that

Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes. (6.2–7.1)

In his *Letter to the Ephesians* he called the Eucharist a ‘medicine of immortality.’ (20.20)

The strong desire for martyrdom in the arena, which Ignatius expresses so graphically, may seem strange to some modern readers. He regarded salvation as freedom from fear of death and ability to face martyrdom bravely. (L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, Columbia University Press, 2008, p.3) ‘Two spiritual “currents” converge in Ignatius, that of Paul, straining with all his might for *union* with Christ, and that of John, concentrated on *life* in him.’ (Pope Benedict XVI, *The Saints*, St. Paul’s Publishing, London, 2010, p.80)

His most famous quotations in this context are from his *Letter to the Romans*: -

I am writing to all the churches and I enjoin all that I am dying willingly for God's sake, if only you do not prevent it. I beg you, do not do me an untimely kindness. Allow me to be eaten by the beasts, which are my way of reaching to God. I am God's wheat, and I am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become the pure bread of Christ.

How good it is to be sinking down below the world's horizon towards God, to rise again later into the dawn of his presence! (n.2)

All the ends of the earth, all the kingdoms of the world would be of no profit to me. So far as I am concerned, to die in Jesus Christ is better than to be monarch of earth's widest bounds. He who died for us is all that I seek; He who rose again for us is my whole desire.... Here is one who only longs to be God's; do not make a present of him to the world again, or delude him with the things of earth. Allow me to attain to light, pure and undefiled; for only when I am come there shall I be truly a man. Leave me to imitate the Passion of my God. If any of you has God within himself, let that man understand my longings, and feel for me, because he will know the forces by which I am constrained. (n.6)

And he issued a challenge to Christians of all times, 'Do not have Jesus Christ on your lips and the world in your heart.' (n.7)

It is a pity that he also wrote concerning slaves: 'Never let them get above themselves. It should be their aim to be better slaves, for the glory of God.' (*Letter to Polycarp*, 4)

'There is no compulsion found with God. His mission was no pursuit or hounding of us, it was an invitation to us; it was in love, not in judgment, that He sent him.' [Christ] (*Letter to Diognetus*, 7)

## **SAINT LUKE the EVANGELIST: 18 October**

An early tradition claims that Luke was a Greco-Syrian physician, possibly born a pagan, who lived in the Greek city of Antioch in Syria, and, having served the Lord continuously, died at the age of eighty-four, unmarried and without children. Some say he was one of the seventy disciples chosen by Jesus (Luke 10.1), but this is doubtful as he himself freely admits that he was not an eyewitness to the events of the Gospel. (1.1–4) He is mentioned in three of Saint Paul's letters, including Colossians where he is described by Paul as 'our dear friend Luke, the doctor.' (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4.11) Early Church Fathers such as Jerome and Eusebius said that he was the author of the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Acts of Apostles*, and this tradition is still held today.

Luke repeatedly uses the word "we" in describing the Pauline missions in the *Acts of the Apostles*, indicating that he was personally there at those times. He was likely with him on his second and third journeys and during his imprisonment in Rome in 61-63 A.D. Despite his, he shows little of Paul's influence, although his Gospel is the most theological of the Synoptics. Unlike Matthew and Mark, he uses the title *Lord* of Jesus. He was familiar with the Old Testament, and used a polished Greek poetic style. His intention in writing is theological and orientated to the proclamation of the faith, reproducing the teaching of the apostolic church; but this does not distort his picture of Jesus. He wrote his gospel

for Gentiles, either omitting matters from Jewish tradition which would be unfamiliar to them, or explaining them where necessary.

For sources, he drew substantially, perhaps mainly, on Mark, broadly following his outline. It is possible that both on them drew on a now lost common source, called by scripture scholars Q, the short for *Quelle*, or source, in German. He also, in 9.51 to 18.14, used as another source a collection of sayings and parables, with a journey by Jesus to Jerusalem, where his mission would reach its climax, as its focus.

Luke is a spokesman for the early Christian community which, having heard and seen the words and actions of Jesus, reflected on them, preached and taught them, and then, as eye-witnesses began to die out, committed to writing the memory of the community. Within a framework of substantial unity in the Gospels, especially between Matthew, Mark and Luke, there is difference of emphasis, focus, and priorities. For Luke, history serves theology: to tell the story of God's saving intervention in the world in and through the person of Jesus was central.

Luke was called by Dante 'the scribe of the gentleness of Christ.' But he often evokes images of religious dread and terror towards God. He wrote so as to win people to the Christian faith, portraying Romans in a good light, for instance, probably with an eye to impressing Gentile readers, many of whom might be Roman. (As he wrote after the suppression of the Jewish revolt by Rome in 70

AD, probably between 70 and 90, he may also have wanted to distinguish Christians from Jews in the eyes of the Roman authorities.) Although familiar with the Hebrew Bible, it is strange, perhaps, in view of his Gentile audience, that, in the infancy narratives of chapters 1 and 2, he takes such care to present Jesus as the fulfilment of the Jewish scriptures.

Luke wrote to instruct believers and to defend the faith against critics. To achieve this, he, like the other Gospel writers, did not hesitate to edit both oral and written material substantially in ways which modern historians would regard as unacceptable. For instance, he changed chronological sequence, he combined events reported separately elsewhere, and, in a journalistic style, added dramatic flourishes. He did not develop material theologically as Paul did so substantially, and some of the most characteristic Pauline ideas are absent from his writings. His theology was that of his apostolic and Palestinian sources. His use of the term 'Lord' in a developed Christological sense may be an exception to this. Most scholars understand Luke's *Gospel* and *Acts* in the tradition of Greek historiography. There is disagreement about how best to treat Luke's writings, with some historians regarding him as highly accurate, and others taking a more critical approach.

Luke's key ideas are also those of Matthew, Mark and John. There is no significant difference in the picture of Jesus which they present. What makes his Gospel distinct is the stamp of his personality on it - joy, peace, gratitude, prayer, praise of God, and the role of Jesus the



Messiah as the bearer of the Holy Spirit. He is universalist in his outlook: Jesus is the saviour of all humanity, and the Gospel is for everyone. One dimension of this is that he is sympathetic to women, and mentions more of them than do the other evangelists. Another is that he lacks the hostility to Jews found in the other Gospels, especially John's. He speaks of the compassion of Jesus to sinners and sufferers alike. His is a Gospel of social justice: fairness, and detachment in matters of money are important to him.

The composition of his writings, as well as the range of vocabulary used, indicate that he was an educated man. The quote in Colossians differentiating between Luke and other colleagues 'of the circumcision' (4.10, 11, 14) might suggest that he was a Gentile. If this were the case, it would make him the only New Testament writer who can be identified as such. However, that is not the only possibility; the phrase could just as easily be used to differentiate between Christians who observed the rituals of Judaism and those who did not.

Luke's presence in Rome with the apostle Paul near the end of Paul's life is attested by 2 Timothy 4.11: 'Only Luke is with me.' In the last chapter of *Acts*, we find several accounts in the first person also affirming Luke's presence in Rome, including Acts 28.16, 'And when we came to Rome...' According to some authors, Luke contributed to authorship of the *Letter to the Hebrews*.

Some notable characteristics of his gospel are: -

- The theme of Jesus making a journey to Jerusalem.
- The compassion of Jesus for the sufferer, and his mercy towards the sinner.
- Universality – the gospel is for all; and he goes easy on Jews.
- Care for the poor; his is a social gospel.
- Renunciation of self in the following of Jesus – evangelical poverty.
- Special regard for women.
- Joy, gratitude and peace.
- The place of prayer, especially in praise; the *Benedictus*, *Magnificat*, *Nunc, dimittis*, and parts of the *Gloria in excelsis* and *Hail, Mary* are from Luke.

His second work, the *Acts of Apostles*, give such prominence to the Holy Spirit that it has sometimes been called ‘the Gospel of the Holy Spirit.’

The American Franciscan Richard Rohr writes: -

Luke tells us that Jesus walked the journey of faith just as you and I do. That’s the compelling message of the various moments where Jesus needed faith - during his temptation in the desert, during his debates with his adversaries, in the garden, and on the cross. We like to imagine that Jesus did not flinch, doubt or ever question God. The much greater message is that in his humanity he did flinch, have doubts, ask questions - and still remain faithful.

You see Jesus' faith tested in the temptation scenes in Luke 4.1-13. The question is constantly put before him: 'Is God to be trusted?' That is the great question that the human race at the most basic level is asking. We hear Jesus continuing to ever more resoundingly answer, 'Yes, God is on your side. Yes, God is more *for you* than you are for yourself.'

(From Richard Rohr)

## **Sts. JOHN DE BREBEUF, ISAAC JOGUES and COMPANIONS: 19 October**

Jesuit saints Jean de Brébeuf, Noel Chabanel, Antoine Daniel, Charles Garnier, Isaac Jogues, Gabriel Lalemant, and two laymen, René Goupil, a surgeon and lay apostle, the first to be martyred, and Jean de la Lande, died for the faith between 1642 and 1649.

The first Jesuit missionaries arrived in Quebec, Canada, in 1625. Initially, their work was with French settlers and traders and evangelizing the nearby Indians. Soon they extended their missionary efforts to the Huron nation west of Quebec. In Huronia, the first Jesuit missionaries visited the scattered indigenous villages, and were welcomed by local families with whom they came to live.

As the priests' missionary efforts to the Hurons proved successful, more missionaries arrived, and they decided to construct a Christian settlement in Huronia where Indian converts and the missionaries could live. In 1639, they began building Sainte Marie - the first dwelling was a single bark-covered Huron-style cabin that housed ten Jesuits and five workmen. Sainte Marie grew to a fortified village with a residence for twenty-seven priests and thirty-nine French labourers, a church, storehouses for food and equipment, a hospital, and living quarters for visiting Indians. During the first years, the mission prepared hundreds of Indians for baptism and began constructing churches in the Huron villages.

But problems developed. Unwittingly, the French had brought disease with them from their home country, diseases to which they and their forefathers had acquired some immunity but which were new to North America and therefore a serious threat to the unprepared local population, which began to die in large numbers. The missionaries came to be seen as sorcerers, bringing death. In addition, the Iroquois nation to the south-east began to ambush the supply route between Huronia and Quebec. In 1642, Father Isaac Jogues and René Goupil were captured on a return trip to Sainte Marie from Quebec. Monsieur Goupil was martyred while making the sign of the cross on a child. Father Jogues had his fingers eaten and was enslaved. Though he escaped and returned to France, he came back to the North American mission and was martyred in 1646, in present day New York.

In 1648, the Iroquois invaded Huronia. They destroyed several villages, including Teanostaye where Father Antoine Daniel was martyred. That winter, more than six thousand homeless Hurons would find temporary shelter and food at Sainte Marie.

In March 1649, the Iroquois captured Fathers Jean de Brébeuf and Gabriel Lalemant about three miles from Sainte Marie, and took the priests to Saint Ignace where they were tortured and killed. By May 1649, fifteen Huron villages had been destroyed. The survivors fled to Sainte Marie or to neighbouring tribes. The Jesuits, realizing that Sainte Marie could not withstand an attack from the Iroquois, burned the settlement and sought

safety on Saint Joseph Island with the remaining Christian Indians. There they endured a winter plagued by starvation and disease. In December 1649, two more priests, Fathers Charles Garnier and Noel Chabanel, were martyred. In the summer of 1650, the surviving priests with about three-hundred Indians left Huronia. After a forty-nine day journey, they found sanctuary in Quebec.

These North American martyrs were canonized by Pope Pius XI in 1930.

## **SAINT PAUL of the CROSS: 19 October**

Paolo Francesco Danei was born in Piedmont, northern Italy in 1694. He was the son of a wool merchant, and lived a conventional family life. At the age of nineteen he had a conversion experience, which turned him towards prayer. He read the *Treatise on the Love of God* by Saint Francis de Sales, while the direction he received from Capuchin friars taught him the primacy of love, and the need to go beyond our own images of God. It became his lifelong conviction that God is most easily found in the Passion of Jesus Christ. He saw it as the most overwhelming sign of God's love, and at the same time the door to union with God. Paul's life was devoted to bringing this message to all, and to founding a community whose members would do the same.

When he was twenty-six, Paul had a series of prayer experiences which led him to believe that God was inviting him to form a community that would live an evangelical life and promote the love of God revealed in the Passion of Jesus. In a vision, he saw himself clothed in the habit that he and his companions would wear: a long, black tunic, on the front of which was a heart surmounted by a white cross, and in the heart was written "the Passion of Jesus Christ." On seeing it, he heard these words spoken to him, 'This is to show how pure the heart must be that bears the holy name of Jesus graven upon it.' They came to be known as the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ, or the Passionists.

During a retreat of forty days at the end of 1720, and with the encouragement of his bishop, who clothed him in the habit of a hermit, Paul wrote the rule of his new community, of which he was, as yet, the only member, and took the name Paul of the Cross. The community was to live a penitential life, in solitude and poverty, teaching people in the easiest possible way how to meditate on the Passion of Jesus.

His first companion was his own brother, John Baptist, who was ordained to the priesthood with him by Pope Benedict XIII in 1727. After ordination, they devoted themselves to preaching missions in parishes, particularly in remote country places where there wasn't a sufficient number of priests. Their preaching, and the retreats they gave in seminaries and religious houses, brought their mission to the attention of others, and gradually the community grew.

The austerity of life practised by the first Passionists did not encourage large numbers, but Paul preferred a slow, at times painful, growth to something more spectacular. His main aim in the community was, he said, to form 'a man totally God-centred, totally apostolic, a man of prayer, detached from the world, from things and from himself so that he might in all truth be called a disciple of Jesus Christ.'

Paul called his monasteries *retreats* to underline the life of solitude and contemplation which he believed was necessary for someone who wished to preach the message of the Cross. In addition to the communal



celebration of the Divine Office, members of the community were to devote at least three hours each day to contemplative prayer.

During his lifetime, Paul of the Cross was best known as a popular preacher, spiritual director and miracle worker. More than two thousand of his letters, most of them on spiritual direction, have been preserved.

He died on 18 October 1775. By then, the congregation had a hundred and eighty priests and brothers. There was also a monastery of contemplative sisters founded by him a few years before his death to promote the memory of the Passion of Jesus by prayer and penance. Paul used to say of himself, 'I am Paul of the Cross in whom Jesus has been crucified.' He was canonized in 1867 by Pope Pius IX.

He wrote, 'It is an excellent and holy practice to call to mind and meditate on our Lord's Passion, since it is by this path that we shall arrive at union with God. In this, the holiest of all schools, true wisdom is learned, for it was there that all the saints became wise.' (From a letter)

## **SAINT PETER of ALCÁNTARA: 19 October**

Juan de Sanabria was born in Alcántara, Spain, in 1499. His father was a regional governor, and his mother came from a noble family. After first studying in his home town, he went to the University of Salamanca at the age of fourteen.

Returning home after two years, he became a Franciscan in 1515 and was given the name of Peter. It was a time of reform in the order, and Peter joined a branch of strict observance. (In Spain, the Protestant Reformation was forestalled by reformation within the Catholic church, led by saints such as Peter, Teresa of Ávila, and John of the Cross, and church leaders such as Cardinal Ximenes.) At the age of twenty-two, Peter was sent to found a new community, received ordination at twenty-five, and was appointed guardian a year later. Then he began preaching, preferring to preach to the poor. His sermons, taken mostly from the wisdom and prophetic books of the Old Testament, show great human sympathy.

When he was elected provincial he set out to draw up the Constitutions of the Stricter Observance. However, his severe ideas met with such opposition that he renounced the office of Minister Provincial and retired into the mountains of Portugal. Soon, though, other friars joined him, and several communities were established. Peter was chosen as guardian and master of novices.

Returning to Spain in 1553, he spent two more years in solitude. Then he journeyed barefoot to Rome and obtained permission from Pope Julius III to found strict friaries in Spain. Not discouraged by the opposition and failure his reforms had previously met, he drew up new constitutions which were even more severe. This reform spread rapidly into other parts of Spain and Portugal. (These various Franciscan reform movements were brought into one under Pope Leo XIII in 1897.)

Peter was fortunate in his friends: among them were Saints Francis Borgia, John of Ávila, Teresa of Ávila, and the Venerable Luis of Granada. Peter saw Teresa as someone chosen by God, and her success in reforming Carmel was in some measure due to his counsel, encouragement, and defence. It was a letter from Peter that encouraged her to found her first convent at Ávila.

In 1556 Peter published a *Treatise on Prayer and Meditation*, which draws on Luis of Granada's ideas. In it, he wrote, 'We should endeavour to unite prayer and contemplation, making the first a ladder for attaining to the second.'

Saint Teresa's autobiography is the source of much of our information about Peter's life, work, and miracles. He often went into ecstasy, and is said to have slept for only an hour and a half each day. While in prayer, he was often seen in ecstasy and levitation. On his deathbed, when offered a drink of water, he refused, saying, 'My Lord Jesus Christ thirsted on the cross.'

Besides the *Constitutions of the Stricter Observance* and many letters on spiritual subjects, especially to Saint Teresa of Ávila, he composed a short treatise on prayer. Many miracles were attributed to him in his lifetime. He died while kneeling in prayer on 18 October 1562 and was canonized by Pope Clement IX in 1669. He is the patron saint of night-time adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and also of Brazil.

**SAINT JOHN OF CAPESTRANO (CAPESTRAN):**  
**23 October**

John was born in 1386 of an Italian mother and a German father in Capestrano, a town in the Abruzzi region of Italy. As a young man he trained in civil and canon law. On one occasion, he was asked to mediate in a dispute between two warring Italian states and agreed to do so – but found himself imprisoned. After some time, he was freed.

He married, but soon left his wife and had the marriage annulled on grounds of non-consummation. He joined the Franciscan friars in 1420 at the age of thirty-four. Even before ordination he became known in northern Italy and central Europe as a preacher. It was said that he sometimes drew crowds of over a hundred thousand - a huge number in the days before loud-speakers.

Along with his associate in preaching, Saint Bernardine of Siena, he set out to reform the friars – a difficult task! Reformers tend to be of two basic types: the first, who lead by example, who motivate and enthuse, and who encourage the weak to do better, and, the second, those obsessed by one idea, and see nothing else, and who want to impose their will on others. John's methods were violent, and seem driven more by fanaticism than by love.

Like Bernardine, John, in his preaching, gave special attention to promoting devotion to the Holy Name of

Jesus. Some of this drew down on him the critical attention of the Inquisition. Given a hearing before it, he acquitted himself.

He attended the Council of Florence (1438-1440), and was an adviser to several popes before and after it.

About 1451, he preached extensively against Jews in Germany and Poland. This resulted in their expulsion in large numbers from towns and cities across the south of Germany, and some were burnt alive. John took part in inquisitions against them, and is listed in the *Hebrew Encyclopaedia* as a persecutor of Jews.

While this was going on, a movement for social change in the area now known as the Czech Republic came into being, led by Jan Huss. His was a social reform with a religious dimension. In religious matters, he wanted people to be free to read the Bible, to have Communion under both kinds, and to reduce the secular power of the clergy.

John saw this as heresy and attacked Huss in his preaching. While others worked to create a dialogue between Huss and the church, John set out to frustrate them and prevent dialogue, and in this he succeeded. It seems that he saw dialogue as spineless and mealy-mouthed, and he opposed it with all his formidable strength. In the end, Huss was invited by the Council of Constance to state his views. He was given a letter of safe conduct, but, when he came, he was told that a promise made to a heretic was not binding. He was taken

out of the city and burned to death. (This betrayal caused lasting bitterness among the Czech people, and, when Luther entered the scene in the next century, they embraced him warmly.)

The Turks, having captured Constantinople in 1453, moved on to besiege Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. With Hunyady of Hungary, John organized and led an army against them and defeated them outside the city. Hailed as a hero, he died of plague in 1456 at Villach in Austria.

A saint is someone who practises heroic virtue, whose life is a model for other Christians to follow. Was John such a man?

## **SAINT ANTHONY MARY CLARET: 24 October**

Antony Maria Claret was born near Barcelona, Spain, in 1807, the son of a wool merchant. He received an elementary education in his native village, and, at the age of twelve, became a weaver. Later he went to Barcelona to specialize in his trade, and remained there until he was twenty. Meanwhile he used his spare time to study Latin, French, and engraving.

Believing he was called to religious life, he left Barcelona, wishing to become a Carthusian, but finally entered the diocesan seminary, where he was ordained in 1835. He was appointed to his home parish, where he continued to study theology for another four years.

But missionary work strongly appealed to him, so he went to Rome, where he entered the Jesuit novitiate. But he had to leave due to ill health. He returned to Spain and worked in parish ministry, attracting notice by his efforts on behalf of the poor. He preached parish missions throughout Cataluña. In 1848, he was sent to the Canary Islands where he gave retreats for fifteen months.

On his return to Spain, he established in 1849 the Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, informally known as the Claretians. He also set up a religious library and publishing house in Barcelona which issued several million cheap copies of the best ancient and modern Catholic works.



Pope Pius IX, at the request of Queen Isabella II of Spain, appointed him Archbishop of Santiago, Cuba, in 1849. On arriving there, he began the work of reform. The seminary was reorganized, clerical discipline strengthened, and over nine thousand marriages validated within two years of his arrival. He built a hospital and schools. Three times he made a visitation of the entire diocese, giving local missions constantly. His work stirred up opposition in the anti-clerical mood of the period, especially from slave-owners. No fewer than fifteen attempts were made on his life; once his cheek was slashed from ear to chin by the knife of a would-be assassin.

In 1857, Anthony was recalled to Spain by Queen Isabella II, who made him her confessor; this meant he had to resign his Cuban see. At home, he directed his efforts to helping the poor and propagating learning. For nine years he was rector of the Escorial monastic school, where he established a scientific laboratory, a museum of natural history, a library, and schools of music and languages. His further plans were frustrated by a revolution in 1868.

He continued his parish missions and distribution of books wherever he went, accompanying the Spanish court. When a united Italy was formed in 1861, and was recognized by Spain, Anthony left the court in protest and went to Rome. But the pope sent him back with faculties for absolving Queen Isabella from the censures she had incurred for this.

In 1869, he went to Rome to prepare for the first Vatican Council. Owing to failing health he withdrew to France. He died there in a Cistercian abbey on 24 October 1870, aged 63.

By his sermons and writings he contributed to bringing about the revival of the Catalan language, although most of his works were published in Spanish, especially during his stay in Cuba and Madrid. His printed works number more than one hundred, and include his autobiography. The congregation he founded had 450 houses and 3,100 members by the early twenty-first century, mostly in Spanish-speaking countries. Anthony also founded several congregations of sisters. He was canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1950.

## SAINTS SIMON and JUDE, APOSTLES: 28 October

Apart from their inclusion in the apostolic lists of the Twelve in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 10.3-4; Mark 3.18; and Luke 6.15-16) and in the Acts of the Apostles (1.13), nothing is known from scripture about Simon and Jude. As with others of the Twelve, their names are recorded, but details are not given. We are simply told that Jesus called them to be apostles, a word which means “sent out.” This mission came into effect especially after Pentecost. (Acts 1.8; 2.)

**Simon** sometimes has the label of “the Less,” probably to distinguish him from Simon Peter. He is known in scripture either as Simon the Canaanite (Matthew 10.4; Mark 3.18) or Simon the Zealot (Luke 6.15; Acts 1.13). The latter may mean that he was zealous in keeping Jewish teaching (the Torah), or that he was a member of the group known as the Zealots. Canaanite and Zealot have the same etymology in Hebrew, from the verb *qanà*, meaning to be zealous. The Zealots were ultra-nationalists, the spiritual heirs of the Maccabees, whose view of the Messiah was that he would be the political liberator of Israel. They were the instigators and mainstay of the revolt against Rome which broke out in 66 AD. They were the Palestinian Provos and their customary tactic was that of assassination by knifing individuals, either Romans or their collaborators, in crowded places. The Romans called them *sicarii*, dagger-men. It says much for the force of Jesus’

personality that he was able to bring into one group a man such as Simon the Zealot, and Matthew who collected taxes on behalf of the Roman occupiers or their local puppets. In other circumstances, Simon would have considered that he had done his good deed for the day if he had slipped the blade of a knife between Matthew's ribs.

There are various traditions, none of them reliable, in which he, sometimes with Jude, preached the gospel after Pentecost – in Egypt, Iran, Syria or Turkey.

**Jude**, one of the Twelve, is regarded by some as the author of the Letter of Jude. Other scholars, however, say the contrary, because, in v.17 of that Letter, the author speaks of himself in a manner which suggests that he was not an apostle - 'you, beloved, must remember the predictions of the apostles...' - and because the letter was written as late as 80 or 90 AD. Another Jude, traditionally held to be a brother of James, was described as the brother of the Lord (Mark 6.3). He is generally understood to be the same person as Thaddaeus of Matthew 10.3, perhaps to distinguish him from Judas "not Iscariot" in John 14.22.

In John 14.22-24, there is a short dialogue between Jude and Jesus: -

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?'

Jesus answered him, ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.’

In the Orthodox Churches, Saint Simon and Saint Jude (“the brother of the Lord”) are commemorated separately. They are included in the Catholic liturgy because of their status as apostles.

The Armenian Apostolic Church regards Saints Thaddaeus and Bartholomew as the first to preach the Gospel in Armenia; it commemorates the two together.

There is a legend about Jude’s face being torn off in a persecution, and he is depicted holding its skin in his hands like a towel, e.g. his statue in Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome. By tradition, he is the patron saint of desperate cases.

Nothing is known about the deaths of these two men, but there is a tradition that all the apostles except John, died a martyr’s death.

## **SAINT MARTIN de PORRES: 3 November**

Juan Martín de Porres was born in Lima, Peru, in 1579, the son of a Spanish father and a Peruvian mother who had been a slave. He apprenticed, first to a barber-surgeon, and then to a pharmacist, giving people home-made medication. At the age of fifteen, he entered a Dominican priory, first as a servant, and then as a member of the Third Order. When he was thirty-four, the Order dropped its ban on admitting men of mixed race, and he was accepted as a lay-brother.

He continued his work, serving the poor for twenty-five years, until his death. He established an orphanage and a children's hospital, and ran a centre which fed one hundred and sixty poor people each day. Many miracles were attributed to him in his care of the sick; it was said that he healed people just by giving them a glass of water. One day, when a very dirty and ill beggar came to the door, and no bed was available for him, Martin gave him his own. Another friar reproved him for this lack of hygiene, but Martin replied, 'Compassion is more important than cleanliness.'

On another occasion, Martin took into the house an Indian who had been stabbed in a fight. Again he gave him his own bed, as no other was available. The prior scolded him, reminding him that he had forbidden him to do this. Martin replied, 'Forgive my error, and please instruct me, because I did not know that obedience took precedence over charity.' (!) The prior had the sense to

learn and told Martin to feel free in future to do whatever he thought best.

Some of the special features of his life were the practice of prayer and penance, including fasting – he was a vegetarian. As well as love for people, he loved animals, too. He had high regard for manual work, and is often depicted holding a sweeping brush. He had a great love for the Eucharist, and was appointed patron saint of Eucharistic congresses, of inter-racial relations and public health workers. Martin had always wanted to be a missionary, but although he never left his native city, there are stories of him being seen elsewhere, even in Africa and Asia. He was known as a man who gave people love and hope. Among his friends were Saints Rose of Lima and John de Massias.

Martin died in 1639, and was canonized by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

## **SAINT CHARLES BORROMEEO: 4 November**

Charles Borromeo was born in Rocca di'Arona, Italy, on 2 October 1538 to a family of minor nobility. At the age of twelve, he inherited an abbey's revenue from an uncle, but applied it to the care of the poor. From 1552, he studied civil and canon law at Pavia. In 1554, his father died, and although he had an elder brother, his family asked him to take charge of the family affairs. He did so, but then, after a time, resumed his studies and took his doctoral degree.

In 1559, an uncle, Cardinal Angelo de Medici, was elected pope as Pius IV. The new pope named Charles as his secretary of state at the age of twenty-two, created him cardinal, and then, at twenty-six, archbishop of Milan. On the death of his elder brother, the Borromeo family urged Charles to leave the priesthood, marry and have children so that the family name would not die out. He declined, working instead for the reform of the church.

He was influential in the last sessions of the Council of Trent, and played a large part in drafting the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*. He instituted the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine for teaching it to children.

But his principal concern was for his diocese of Milan, which had not had a resident bishop for eighty years. He convoked eleven diocesan synods and six provincial ones. He made three complete pastoral visits of the



diocese; a priority for him was that the liturgy be celebrated with respect. He divided the nave of churches in two to separate the sexes and invented the confession box.

He believed that most abuses in the church arose because the clergy were uneducated. Among his more important actions, he established seminaries, colleges and communities for the education of candidates for holy orders. Using his family fortune he endowed a college at Pavia. He founded a congregation of diocesan priests modelled on the Jesuits and called the Oblates. His emphasis on learning greatly improved the preparation of candidates for orders.

Prayer and penance were prominent features of his life and teaching. He used to say, 'Souls are won on one's knees,' and, 'The best way not to find the bed too cold is to go to bed colder than the bed is.' He saw personal example as the most important part of preaching: -

If teaching and preaching is your job, then study diligently and apply yourself to whatever is necessary for doing the job well. Be sure that you first preach by the way you live. If you do not, people will notice that you say one thing, but live otherwise, and your words will bring only cynical laughter and a shake of the head.

He also said,

Those who desire to make progress in the service of God must begin every day of their life with new ardour, keep themselves in the presence of God as much as possible, and have no other view or end in all their actions but the divine honour.

Charles was a man of his times, and the times were those of an aggressive counter-Reformation. In 1583, he began a visitation of the cantons of Switzerland. There he had about a hundred people arrested for witchcraft. Ten women and a priest were condemned to 'the flaming death,' that is, they were killed by being put head-first into a fire. He also encouraged the formation of a league of Catholic cantons, called the Borromean League, which expelled Protestants, and burned some people at the stake. This created severe strains in the civil administration of the Swiss confederation, and caused the break-up of one canton along religious lines.

In 1576, when Milan suffered an epidemic of bubonic plague, Charles led efforts to care for the sick and bury the dead. He avoided no danger and spared no expense. He visited all the parishes where the disease was found, distributing money, providing accommodation for the sick, and punishing those, especially clergy, who were remiss in fulfilling their duties.

He met with much opposition: the governor of the province and many senators felt that his measures encroached on civil jurisdiction. He also faced opposition from several religious orders, particularly one called the Brothers of Humility. Some of its members

conspired against his life; once, a shot was fired at him, but he escaped unharmed. He had many enemies within the church, but the position he held in Europe was remarkable. The bulk of his correspondence, much of it with kings and queens, testifies to the way his opinion was sought. He is venerated as a saint of learning and the arts.

It is said that his work and penances shortened his life. He developed a fever and died in Milan in 1584 at the age of forty-six. A nephew of his followed him as archbishop eleven years later, and founded the famous Ambrosian library and art gallery. Charles was canonized in 1610 by Pope Paul V.

## POPE SAINT LEO the GREAT: 10 November

Little is known about Leo's early life. As a deacon, he opposed Pelagianism - from Pelagius, said to have been an Irish monk – which, it was said, implied that grace was not necessary for salvation, but was rather a bonus God granted to those who earned it by good works and personal effort. He became bishop of Rome in 440, and taught the full divinity and humanity of Christ. His most famous work, known as the *Tome, written in 449*, was the basis of the definition by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 that Christ is one Divine Person possessing two complete natures, human and divine. The bishops acclaimed his definition, saying, 'It is Peter who speaks through the voice of Leo.'

On the day on which he became pope, 29 September 440, Leo, beginning by quoting 1 Peter 2.9-10, said,

Although the church is ordered in various ranks, we are all one in Christ. In the unity of our faith and baptism we enjoy an undivided fellowship, and a dignity common to us all. In baptism the sign of the cross makes kings of all who are reborn in Christ, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit consecrates them priests. So, apart from the particular obligations of our pastoral ministry, any Christian who has the gifts of rational and spiritual understanding knows that he is a member of a kingly race, and shares in the priestly office. (*Sermon 4.1; PL 54.149*)

*Leo* was pope at a troubled time when barbarian armies were ravaging the once mighty Roman Empire. The Western Empire was in political and military collapse, and there was a vacuum of leadership. *Leo* filled the void, and became the advocate of the people. He is most famous for, it is said, persuading *Attila the Hun* to abandon his plans to sack Rome and to withdraw his forces beyond the River Danube (452). When the Vandals swept into central Italy in 455, he was once again the people's spokesman and secured concessions for them.

*Leo* urged Christians to be aware of their dignity: -

Christian, recognize your dignity, and, now that you share in God's own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sinning. Remember who is your head and of whose body you are a member. [Christ] Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the kingdom of God. (*Sermon 21 on the Nativity of the Lord*, 3; PL 54.192C)

Through his teaching and leadership, *Leo centralized* the papacy, extending its authority to France, Spain and Africa; he made a case for its divine institution by examining the biblical evidence for Peter's unique role among the apostles.

Apart from the *Tome*, *Leo's* surviving writings consist of 143 letters and 96 sermons, which cover the liturgical year. One of his sayings was, 'If faith is not one, then it

is not faith.’ (Sermon on the Nativity of the Lord, 4, 6: SC 22, 110)

Leo took issue with the emperor for interfering in church affairs, writing to him, ‘He who covets what is not his due loses what is rightfully his.’ (Letter 104.3 to Emperor Marcian; PL 54.995)

Here are some extracts from his sermons on Lent: -

Let us now [in Lent] extend to the poor and those afflicted in different ways a more open-handed generosity, so that God may be thanked through many voices and the relief of the needy supported by our fasting. No act of devotion on the part of the faithful gives God more pleasure than that which is lavished on his poor. Where God finds charity with its loving concern, there he recognizes the reflection of his own fatherly care. (Sermon 10 in Lent 4-5; PL 54.300-301)

What the Christian should be doing at all times should be done now with greater zeal and devotion, so that the Lenten fast enjoined by the apostles may be observed not simply by abstinence from food but above all by the renunciation of sin. (Sermon 6 on Lent 1-2; PL 54.287)

Leo, who died in 461, is regarded as one of the more important of the Western Fathers of the church. He was declared doctor of the church by Pope Benedict XIV, with the title of doctor of the church’s unity. He is one of only two popes in two thousand years to be called the Great, the other being Gregory I. (September 3)

## **SAINT MARTIN of TOURS: 11 November**

Martin was born in Hungary in 315, where his father, a pagan, was an officer in the Roman army; but he grew up in Pavia, in northern Italy.

At the age of ten, against the wishes of his parents, he went to a Christian church and became a catechumen. In 313, Christianity was made legal, but was by no means dominant. It had more adherents in the Eastern Empire, and was concentrated in cities - the word *pagan* literally meant a person living in the countryside – having been brought along trade routes by converted Jews and Greeks. Christianity was still far from accepted amongst the higher echelons of society; in the army, the cult of Mithras was much stronger. Although the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, and the subsequent programme of church-building, gave a great impetus to its spread, it was still a minority faith. When Martin was fifteen, he was required to join a cavalry unit, and was stationed at Amiens, France.

While he was there, he experienced the vision that became the most-repeated story about his life. It is related that one winter's day as he was approaching the gates of the city of Amiens he met a scantily clad beggar. Martin impulsively cut his cloak in half and shared it with him. That night, he dreamt of Jesus wearing the half-cloak he had given away, and heard Jesus say to the angels, 'Here is Martin, the Roman soldier who is not baptized; he has clad me.'

The dream confirmed Martin in his faith, and he was baptized at the age of eighteen. Though an officer, he was known for treating his personal servant as a brother. He served in the military for another two years until, just before a battle, he determined that his faith prohibited him from fighting, saying, 'I am a soldier of Christ; I cannot fight.' He was charged with cowardice and jailed. In response to the charge, he volunteered to go unarmed at the front of the troops. His superiors planned to take him up on the offer, but before they could, the invaders sued for peace, the battle never took place, and Martin was discharged from military service.

He went to Tours, where he became a disciple of Hilary of Poitiers, a chief proponent of Trinitarian Christianity, opposing the Arianism of the imperial court. When Hilary was forced into exile, Martin returned to Italy, where he converted both his mother and an Alpine bandit. When he was expelled from Milan by the Arian bishop of the city, he sought shelter on an island where he lived the life of a hermit.

With Hilary's encouragement, Martin established a monastery at Ligugé, the oldest known monastery in Europe; it became a centre for the evangelization of the surrounding districts. He travelled and preached throughout western France. The memory of these missionary journeys survives to our day in numerous local legends in which Martin is the hero.

In 371, Martin became bishop of Tours, and introduced a parish system. He enthusiastically destroyed pagan



temples, altars and sculptures, not without opposition, but he strongly opposed the execution by the emperor, at the instigation of a Spanish bishop, of a heretical group of Christians called Priscillianists. Martin did so because he opposed state interference in church affairs.

Martin withdrew to live in one of the monasteries he had founded, and died on 8 November 397.

His life touches on a point of significance in the early centuries: in a relatively short time, the church moved from persecution to persecuting, invoking imperial power against pagans, Arians and Donatists - Saint Augustine and *compelle intrare* - among others. From an early attitude of reserve towards military service, as with Martin, what developed after the conferral of establishment status on the church by Emperor Theodosius in 381 was the idea that such service was a religious as well as civic duty.

(In modern times, Martin has been co-opted by the political right in France for royalist, nationalist and militarist purposes. For that reason, devotion to him in France has become divisive. When the World War I armistice fell on Saint Martin's Day, 11 November 1918, some French people saw it as a sign of his intercession on behalf of France. In recent times, the Le Pen family and the National Front political party have similarly co-opted Saint Joan of Arc to an anti-immigration agenda. She was the saint who drove the foreigners out of France, and there is an annual Mass in her honour in

Paris which is used to reinforce the Front's anti-immigration policy.)

## **SAINT JOSAPHAT: 12 November**

Josaphat Kunsevych was born about 1580 in the region of Volhynia, then part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, to Orthodox parents, and was baptized with the name John. He showed unusual ability at school, studying Old Slavonic, the language of the Russian Orthodox liturgy, and learning the Liturgy of the Hours (the Divine Office) by heart, at a time when there was little preaching or catechetical instruction. He was popular with his fellow-children.

As a young man, he became an apprentice to a merchant called Papovič in Vilnius, a Polish-Lithuanian city. At first, Josaphat annoyed him, because, every chance he got, he spent time in prayer or study, but, after a while, won his respect to such an extent that he offered him his fortune and his daughter's hand in marriage. Josaphat declined.

As a young man he became a Catholic. In 1604, at the age of about twenty-four, he entered the monastery of the Holy Trinity of the Order of Saint Basil at Vilnius, Lithuania. His favourite devotional exercise was to make prostrations in which the head touches the ground, saying the "Jesus Prayer" of the Orthodox: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner' (or a shortened version thereof). Never eating meat, he fasted a lot, wore a hair shirt and a chain, slept on the bare floor, and beat his body until blood flowed. His Jesuit teachers often urged him to moderate those austerities.

Stories of his holiness spread, and distinguished people began to visit him. While in the monastery, a regeneration of Eastern Catholic religious life among Belarusians and Ukrainians took hold. Josaphat was ordained priest in 1609 and subsequently given the leadership of several monasteries. In 1617, he became bishop of Vitebsk, and then, a year later, archbishop of Polotsk.

From his study of the Slavonic-Byzantine liturgical books he drew arguments for Catholic doctrine, and wrote several works - *On the Baptism of Saint Volodymyr*; *On the Falsification of the Slavic Books by the Enemies of the Metropolitan*; *On Monks and their Vows*. As deacon, priest, and bishop, he was distinguished by extraordinary zeal and by great devotion during the Divine Liturgy. He preached and heard confessions not only in churches, but also in fields, hospitals, prisons, and anywhere he met the need. This zeal, united with his kindness to the poor, won great numbers of Orthodox to Catholic unity. Among these was Ignatiev, a former Patriarch of Moscow.

A union between the Ukrainian-Belorussian Orthodox church and the Catholic Church had been agreed at Brest, Belarus, in 1596. In Vilnius, Josaphat had already experienced the tensions of a city marked by religious division. The legacy of the East-West schism still resonated, and two contending parties struggled for power: the party, led by Josaphat which promoted unity with Rome, and those rejecting the Union - each with its own hierarchy. Josaphat's activity evoked strong

reactions. The inhabitants of the city of Mogilev revolted against him in October 1618 and drove him out. He complained to King Sigismund, and the Orthodox revolt was suppressed. Its leaders were executed, and Orthodox churches were taken and given to the Greek Catholics. But, as archbishop, he restored those churches to the Orthodox.

Josaphat also issued a catechism to the clergy with instructions that it be learned by heart; he composed rules for priestly life, entrusting to deacons the task of superintending their observance, and he assembled synods in various towns in the dioceses. In all of this, he continued his monastic life and penances.

The relationship between Catholic and Orthodox in Ukraine is analogous to that of Catholic and Protestant in Northern Ireland. Religious difference is compounded by divisions over nationality, culture, political allegiance, land, and property. (During the days of the Soviet Union, Stalin exploited those divisions. Before World War II, he confiscated Catholic churches and gave them to the Orthodox, and forced the conversion of some Catholics to Orthodoxy. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Orthodox Church was mostly unwilling to return those churches and friction continues as a result.)

As sometimes happens when a person works for reconciliation, success with one group evokes anger and even hatred from another. This was the case with Josaphat. He experienced great opposition from opponents of the Brest agreement, and, on 12 November,

1623, at Vitebsk in Belarus, a bullet fired from an Orthodox mob and a blow from an axe ended his life. The effect was the opposite of what his killers intended: it brought many Orthodox believers into union with the Catholic Church.

Josaphat was beatified in 1643 and canonized in 1867.

## **SAINT ALBERT the GREAT: 15 November**

Albert was born in Bavaria about 1200 to a family of minor nobility. He was educated first at Padua, in Italy, where he studied Aristotle. Then, about 1222, he joined the newly-founded Dominican Order, despite his family's efforts to remove him by force, and studied theology at Bologna. Later, he was chosen to lecture at several centres in Germany, before going to Paris in 1245, where he gained his doctorate and had Thomas Aquinas as one of his students.

Albert commented on virtually all the writings of Aristotle, thereby making them available to a wider academic audience. This, in turn, led him to study the teachings of Muslim academics, notably Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), in an early example of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Albert saw science and religion as partners, and was ahead of his time in his attitude towards science. Firstly, he did not study it only from books as other writers did, but observed and experimented with nature. (This led to accusations that he dabbled in alchemy, magic and witchcraft. After his death, in a not uncommon practice, some authors on those subjects sought to give their writings authority by attributing them to him.) Secondly, he took the view that scientific method had to be appropriate to the topic under consideration. Most scientists of his time thought that all science should be based on mathematics.

In 1254, Albert was made provincial of the Dominican Order, and fulfilled the office with care. He publicly defended his confrères against attacks by clergy of the University of Paris.

In 1260, he became bishop of Regensburg. He walked the length and breadth of the diocese, refusing to use a horse because it was a symbol of wealth. As a result he received the nickname of “Bishop Boots.” However, he resigned after only three years to return to the halls of learning, his natural environment.

He spent the rest of his life writing and preaching. In 1270, he preached the eighth crusade. He was especially known as a mediator between conflicting parties, for example, between the citizens and the archbishop of Cologne. In the same city, he founded Germany's oldest university. Among his last actions was to defend the orthodoxy of his former pupil, Thomas Aquinas.

In 1278, Albert's memory failed him suddenly in the middle of a lecture, and it became progressively more unreliable. He died in Cologne on 15 November 1280, and his remains are buried in the Dominican church there. He was canonized and proclaimed a doctor of the church in 1931 by Pope Pius XI, and declared patron saint of scientists.

Albert is frequently mentioned by Dante, who made his doctrine of free will the basis of his ethical system. In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante places him with his pupil Thomas Aquinas among the lovers of wisdom in the



*Heaven of the Sun*. Contemporaries such as Roger Bacon applied the term *Great* to him during his lifetime, referring to his immense reputation as a scholar and philosopher. Because of the huge scope of his knowledge they gave him the title of Universal Doctor. Of the Eucharist, he wrote, ‘Not the least gift of his [Jesus’] heart is the Eucharist, which he bestowed upon us out of the immense charity of his heart.’ (*On the Eucharist*, 6.1.1) And, in more general terms,

God can be offered no greater gift than a good will; for the good will is the source of all good and the mother of all virtues; whoever begins to have that good will has gained all the help he needs for the good life.

Albert's writings, collected in 1899, run to thirty-eight volumes. These displayed his encyclopaedic knowledge of topics such as theology, philosophy, astrology, mineralogy, zoology, physiology, logic, botany, geography, chemistry, astronomy and others - all of them the result of observation and logic. He was perhaps the best read author of his time. His principal theological works are a commentary in three volumes on the *Sentences [Thoughts] of Peter Lombard*, and a *Summa Theologiae* in two. He systematized Aristotle's works from Latin translations and notes of Arab commentators. Most modern knowledge of Aristotle was preserved and presented by Albert.

His writing was more philosophical than theological. His knowledge of physical science was considerable,

and, for the age, remarkably accurate. His research in every department was great, and, though there are many gaps in his system, his study of Aristotle gave him a great power of systematic thought and exposition. He even wrote a book on falcons in which he displayed impressive knowledge of the differences between birds of prey and other birds, the different kinds of falcons, the way of preparing them for the hunt, and even cures for sick or wounded falcons!

His attitudes towards women reveal a tedious misogyny, where one suspects that the saints copied from each other and, in turn, from Aristotle. He wrote,

Woman contains more liquid than man, and it is a property of liquid to take things up easily and to hold them poorly. Liquids are easily moved, hence women are inconstant and curious... Woman is a misbegotten man and has a faulty and defective nature in comparison with his. Therefore she is unsure in herself. What she herself cannot get she seeks to obtain through lying and diabolical deceptions. And so, to put it briefly, one must be on guard with every woman, as if she were a poisonous snake and the horned devil. (*Commentary on Aristotle's "Animals,"* 15. ques. 11, cited by Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, Penguin Books, 1990, p.108)

Such ideas suggest repressed sexual feelings which he sought to cope with by demonizing the feminine.

He was deeply interested in astrology, and made it a central component of his philosophical system. He argued that an understanding of celestial influences could help us to live more Christian lives. The most comprehensive statement of his astrological beliefs is to be found in his *Mirror of Astronomy* which he wrote around 1260. But these beliefs can be found in almost everything he wrote, from his early *Summa de Bono* to his last work, the *Summa Theologiae*.

Albert wrote also on music, stating that it operated on three subjective levels: purging of the impure; illumination leading to contemplation; and nourishing perfection through contemplation. Of particular interest is the attention he paid to silence as an integral part of music.

## **SAINT MARGARET of SCOTLAND: 16 November**

Margaret was granddaughter of King Edmund of England, and daughter of his son, Prince Edward. After the Danish conquest of England in 1016, the new king, Knut (Canute), had the infant Edward exiled to the continent. He was taken first to Sweden, and then to Ukraine. As an adult, he travelled to Hungary, where he supported Andrew I's successful bid for the throne. He married a woman called Agatha, who gave birth to Margaret around 1045. Margaret grew up in a religious environment at the court, the new king, Andrew, being known as "Andrew the Catholic" for his aversion to paganism and loyalty to Rome.

While still a child, Margaret returned to England with the rest of her family when her father, Edward, was recalled in 1057 as a possible successor to her great-uncle, the childless King Edward the Confessor. Her father died soon after the family's arrival in England, but Margaret continued to reside at the English court. After the Norman conquest of England in 1066, she was taken first to Normandy in France, then returned to England and took refuge in Northumbria.

According to tradition, the widowed Agatha decided to leave Northumbria with her children and return to the continent. But a storm drove their ship north to Scotland, where they sought the protection of King Malcolm III. The spot where they are said to have landed is known today as Saint Margaret's Hope. Malcolm was probably a

widower, and may have been attracted by the prospect of marrying one of the few remaining members of the Anglo-Saxon royal family. He and Margaret married some time before the end of 1070. They had eight children, two daughters and six sons, three of whom became kings of Scotland.

Margaret's biographer, Turgot, bishop of Saint Andrew's, credits her with having a civilizing influence on her husband who was illiterate by reading him stories from the Bible. Through the convocation of synods, she encouraged religious reform, striving to make the worship and practices of the Scottish church conform to those of Rome. She corresponded with Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury on these matters. The decisions of the synods were known as "The Five Articles of Margaret." She engaged in charitable works, serving orphans and the poor every day before she ate, and washing the feet of the poor. She rose at midnight every night to attend church services. She invited the Benedictine order to establish a monastery at Dunfermline, and established ferries at Queensferry and North Berwick. She also brought about the restoration of the monastery at Iona, and interceded for the release of fellow English exiles, forced into serfdom by the conquest. Because of these things, she was considered an exemplar of "the just ruler", and influenced her husband and children - especially her youngest son, later David I - to be also just and holy rulers.

She spent much time in prayer, devotional reading, and embroidery of church vestments. Malcolm admired her

devotion so much that he had her books decorated in gold and silver. One of those, a pocket Gospel with lavish images of the Evangelists, is kept at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. With significant long-term effect, she was instrumental in making English the language of the Scottish court.

Malcolm seemed happy for her to pursue these concerns, a testament to the strength and affection of their marriage. But he and their eldest son, Edward, were killed in battle against the English in 1093, and Margaret herself died in Edinburgh Castle just three days later on 16 November. Her children carried on her strong Cristian commitment. She was canonised in 1250.

Margaret overcame the obstacle of a troubled childhood, where her life and that of her family of origin was often in danger. In a short life of just forty-eight years, she did much that was both good and lasting.

(See the Note on the Just Ruler)

## SAINT GERTRUDE: 16 November

Gertrude was born on 6 January 1256, at Eisleben in Thuringia, Germany. Nothing is known of her parents, and she may have been an orphan. As a girl of just five years, she joined the Cistercian monastery of Saint Mary at Helfta, Thuringia, under the direction of its abbess, Gertrude of Hackenborn. She is sometimes confused with this abbess, which is why she is often depicted in art - wrongly - holding a crozier.

Gertrude dedicated herself to study, becoming an expert in literature and philosophy. She was associated with Mechtild of Magdeburg and also Saint Mechtild of Hackenborn. After a conversion experience at the age of twenty-five, she turned her talents to scripture and theology, and produced numerous writings, of which only the *Herald of God's Loving-Kindness*, partly written by other nuns and formerly known as her *Life and Revelations*, and the *Spiritual Exercises* remain today. She had various mystical experiences, including, it is said, a vision of Jesus and she was one of the first to practice devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In one of her writings, she declared: -

On the feast of the annunciation I saw the heart of the Virgin Mother so bathed by rivers of grace flowing out of the Blessed Trinity that I understood the privilege Mary has of being the most powerful after

God the Father, the most wise after God the Son, and the most kindly after God the Holy Spirit.

She showed great sympathy towards the souls in purgatory and urged prayer for them. She is invoked on their behalf. Her name has been attached to the following prayer: -

‘Eternal Father, I offer you the most precious Blood of your Divine Son, Jesus Christ, in union with the Masses said throughout the world today, for the souls in Purgatory, for sinners everywhere, for those in my own home, and within my family. Amen.’

Gertrude died at Helfta on 17 September 1302. Though she was never formally canonized, she was given a universal feast day by Pope Clement XII and is patron saint of the West Indies.



## **SAINT ELIZABETH of HUNGARY: 17 November**

Elizabeth was the daughter of a king and queen of Hungary, Andrew and Gertrude. She was born in 1207 in Bratislava, Slovakia, and was given a deeply Christian upbringing in this newly evangelized nation. At the age of fourteen, she was married to a German prince, Ludwig IV, Landgrave of Thuringia, in a dynastic alliance. The marriage appears to have been a happy one, and they had two girls and a boy.

Two years later, Franciscan friars arrived and Elizabeth began enthusiastically to follow the way of Saint Francis in the Secular Franciscan Order. Shortly before his death, Saint Francis sent her a letter of thanks and support.

She gave generously to the poor, supported by her husband, who is informally a saint in Thuringia. In 1226, floods, famine, and plague wrought havoc in Thuringia while Ludwig was away at the Imperial Diet in Italy. Elizabeth took control of affairs at home and distributed alms in all parts of their territory, even giving away state robes and ornaments as well as her personal jewellery to the poor. She also built a hospital with twenty-eight beds and visited the patients daily to attend to them.

Her life changed in 1227 when Ludwig, en route to the Sixth Crusade, died of fever in Italy. On hearing the news, Elizabeth said, 'He is dead. To me it is as if the

whole world died today.' His remains were returned home in 1228.

She said of him,

I have lost everything. O friend of my heart, O good and devout husband, you are dead, and have left me in misery! How can I live without you? Poor, lonely widow and miserable woman that I am, may He who does not forsake widows and orphans console me. O my God, console me! O my Jesus, strengthen me in my weakness!

After Ludwig's death, his brother, Henry, assumed the regency during the minority of Elizabeth's eldest child, Hermann. After bitter arguments over the disposal of her dowry - a conflict in which Konrad of Marburg, her confessor and an inquisitor, was appointed as her official defender by the pope - Elizabeth was expelled from the court, supposedly on the grounds that her charity was emptying the state coffers. Popular tradition has it that she was driven out by Henry, but this does not seem to have been true.

Following her husband's death, Elizabeth made solemn religious vows to Konrad. He demanded total obedience, his spiritual direction was in commands and he ordered her to send her children away. To make her more spiritual, he said, he had her stripped from time to time and flogged her till her blood flowed to the ground. (Peter de Rosa, *Vicars of Christ: the Dark Side of the Papacy*, Bantam Press, London, 1988, p.182) (He

exercised his authority as inquisitor – several bishops were among his victims - with such ruthlessness that he was later murdered.) Her pledge to celibacy proved a hindrance to her family's political ambitions, so she was more or less held hostage at the castle of her uncle, Bishop Ekbert of Bamberg, in an effort to force her to remarry. Elizabeth, however, held fast to her vow, even, it is said, threatening to cut off her nose so that no man would marry her.

She built a hospital at Marburg for the poor and the sick with money from her dowry, and she and her companions cared for them. She said,

‘Here before my eyes is my God and my King, the mild and merciful Jesus crowned with sharp thorns. Shall I, then, lowly creature that I am, remain before him crowned with pearls, gold and precious stones, and mock his crown with mine?’

Her style of prayer was simple and humble: ‘As in heaven your [God’s] will is performed, so may it be done on earth by all creatures, particularly in me and by me.’

Elizabeth died in Marburg in 1231 at the age of twenty-four, and was canonized by Pope Gregory IX just four years later. She was the first member of the Secular Franciscan Order to be canonized, and, along with Saint Louis of France, declared its patron.

(See the Note on the Just Ruler)

## SAINT CECILIA: 22 November

There are many legends about Cecilia, some of which substantially embroider the bare information available. According to Venantius Fortunatus, bishop of Poitiers, (d. 600), she was an only child, and married a man called Valerian. He and his brother, Tiburtius, are said to have died for the faith with her, in Sicily, under the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, between 176 and 180 AD.

Her name is mentioned in the Roman Canon of the Mass, and she has been honoured as a martyr for a very long time. A church was built in her honour in Trastevere, Rome, by Pope Saint Paschal I in the early ninth century, because she was seen as an example of a woman who was prepared to die for her faith. When called upon to worship the Roman gods, she refused and was beheaded. Through a book called *The Passion of Saint Cecilia*, devotion to her became wide-spread.

She is the patroness of musicians and music, because it was said that as she was being led to execution she sang to God. (So did Carmelite nuns in France during the Revolution.) Many choirs and schools of music have been named after her, and poets such as John Dryden and W. H. Auden, and composers such as Henry Purcell and Benjamin Britten have dedicated works to her.

Here is what some Christian writers have had to say about music: -

‘The one who sings well prays twice.’ (Saint Augustine)

‘The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that... it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.’ (Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n.112)

‘Music and silence – how I detest them both!’ (Words of the senior devil in C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters: letters from a senior to a junior devil*, Fontana, London, 1964, Letter 22, p.113)

‘Praise is like music, for as each one possesses God's gifts differently, each one sings God's praises differently, and all of them together form a symphony of love, as of music.’ (Saint John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, nn.14-15)

‘Where'er the Catholic sun doth shine,  
there's music and laughter and good red wine.  
At least I have always found it so.  
Benedicamus Domino.’ (G. K. Chesterton or Hilaire Belloc)

‘Laughter is the music of the soul.’ (Anonymous)

‘There is no truer truth obtainable by man than comes by music.’ (Elizabeth M. Barrett Browning, in *Parleyings with Certain People*, 1887, Charles Avison, St.6)

**SAINT COLUMBANUS (COLUMBAN):**  
**23 November**

Columbanus, not to be confused with Columba (called in Irish *Colm Cille*), was born about 543, perhaps in Meath, or on the Carlow/Wexford border in Ireland.

Monastic life flourished in Ireland in his time. At different times, he lived in the monasteries of Cluan Inis in Fermanagh, Clonard in Meath, and Bangor in Down. He studied scripture and the classics, wrote a commentary on the psalms, and became a priest. For about thirty years he lived the ordinary monastic life, mostly in Bangor. (The *Bangor Antiphonary* is in the Ambrosian Library in Milan.)

Irish monks were influenced by the Desert Fathers of Egypt, especially Saints Anthony and John Cassian, and also Martin of Tours.

A feature of Irish monastic life was the *anam chara* (Irish, soul-friend), a spiritual companion who would be a listener, guide and counsellor. When he was about forty-five, he felt called to a life which was both missionary and monastic, a *peregrinatio pro Christo*, a pilgrimage for Christ. It was so difficult and challenging that it subsequently became known as the “white martyrdom.” His abbot, Comghall, gave him his support, so, about 590, Columbanus sailed for Brittany in the north of France with twelve companions.

The continent where they landed was in chaos, following the collapse of the Roman Empire. Local rulers sometimes controlled the church, imposing as bishops half-pagan cronies – often relatives, so as to keep the revenue in the family. There was ignorance and lawlessness everywhere and many Christians had relapsed into paganism. Over a period of twenty years, Columbanus founded monasteries in Annagray, Fontaine, and Luxeuil in the Vosges region of France. In time, ‘The abbey of Luxeuil was recognised as the monastic capital of all the countries under Frankish government,’ and, ‘It was at the cost of their unceasing toil [the Irish monks] that half of our country [France] and an ungrateful Europe were restored to civilization and life.’ (Charles de Montalembert, *The Monks of the West*, Vol.2, book 7) Similarly, Pope Pius XI wrote, ‘The more light that is shed by scholars on the period known as the Middle Ages, the clearer it becomes that it was thanks to the initiative and labour of Columbanus that the rebirth of Christian virtue and civilization over a great part of Gaul, Germany and Italy took place.’

It is said that he organized the monasteries so that, between them, there would be praise of God round the clock. They became centres of learning, especially for the study of scripture and the classics - in effect, the universities of their time. They brought with them the *anam chara* idea, and it helped pave the way for one-to-one confession of sin. In the generation that followed, his monastic foundations grew to about sixty in number and some twelve monks were chosen from their members to become bishops.

He wrote a *Rule* of life for the monks. It was short, but severe in places, in its imposition of fasting and even beatings for offences such as smiling during the liturgy (!), and was gradually superseded by Saint Benedict's. It has been described as his spiritual autobiography, and includes the following: -

Nothing is sweeter than a good conscience, nothing more secure than purity of soul; but no one can bestow these on themselves, because they are properly the gift of another.

Interestingly, attempted reforms of Benedictine life have tended to lean towards that of Columbanus.

Columbanus' monastic life was characterized by prayer, manual work, study and penance, often in solitude, in caves or "dysarts." He spread Celtic penitential practices among the Franks, emphasizing private confession to a priest rather than the previous public confession. This changed was widely welcomed and became the norm throughout the church. (Oscar D. Watkins, *A History of Penance*, Longmans Green & Co., London, 1920, pp.615, 124)

He publicly condemned evil wherever he saw it: he criticized Pope Vigilius, who had usurped the papacy through the influence of Empress Theodora, writing that he had not been vigilant in defending the faith against false teaching: '... *non vigilavit Vigilius.*' ('Vigilius was not vigilant.')



There was friction between him and local bishops, and in 603 they called him to meet them at Chalon-sur-Saône. Ostensibly, the issue was that the Celtic monastic tradition followed the Eastern Church's dating of Easter, in contrast to the French, who followed the Roman, or Western, dating. However, the "Celtic" dating was the one originally used in Rome before it (Rome) changed. Columbanus did not appear before them, lest, as he said, 'he might contend in words.' Instead he wrote them a letter characterized by a mixture of freedom, respect, and charity. In it he admonished them to hold synods more frequently, and to pay attention to local issues of greater importance than the date of Easter, especially their morals. He also wrote to Pope Boniface IV asking for his support for the Irish position.

After twenty years in France, he and his non-French monks were expelled. It seems that the real reason may have been that he had reproved some of the local bishops for their too ready accommodation to the corrupt and even murderous life-styles of the Merovingian kings. The latter's history reads like a chronicle of adulteries and murders and has all the dignity of a series of dog-fights. He took to the Rhine and went to Austria, where he founded a monastery in Bregenz. After about three years, and the murder of two of the monks, in his late sixties, he crossed the Alps into the north of Italy around 613. (One of his monks, Gallus, stayed behind and became the founder of the still-extant abbey of Saint Gall in Switzerland.) Columbanus re-built a half-ruined church dedicated to Saint Peter, and founded a monastery at Bobbio, in the Trebbia Valley between

Milan and Genoa, making it a base for efforts to overcome the Arianism and Nestorianism which were widespread. He wrote to Pope Boniface IV urging him to take decisive action in the matter. It became a cultural centre on a par with the abbey of Monte Cassino.

Columbanus died in 615. His memory is recalled in the town of San Colombano where his tomb remains. Like other men, he was not faultless. His saying, 'Love is not orderly,' may express something of his personality. He has been described as a gifted leader, a mixture of genius and stubbornness. He had a gift for friendship, giving and receiving it. He was eager, passionate, and determined; he was impetuous and head-strong. Those characteristics were his strength and his weakness.

The main source for his life is Jonas of Susa, an Italian monk who entered the monastery there in 618, just three years after Columbanus' death. Columbanus' extant writings, mainly his monastic Rule, poetry, letters, sermons and a treatise against the Arians were re-published in 1970. The *Bobbio Missal* is a manuscript from the seventh century re-discovered in the seventeenth century. It is an Irish document in Romanized form containing an *Order of Mass* for various days and intentions, an *Order of Baptism*, and a blessing of ashes; it is now in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris.

Irish missionary congregations, founded in the early twentieth century, taking him as their patron – the

Columban sisters and priests - keep his missionary tradition alive, especially in the far east of Asia.

Here are some prayers of his: -

Loving Saviour, reveal yourself to us, so that, knowing you we may love you; loving you we may desire you; desiring you we may contemplate you; you alone, by day and by night, and ever hold you in our thoughts. Inspire us with your love, till it is so huge that even the many waves of the world cannot quench it.

Lord, grant me, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son, my God, that love which knows no fall, so that my lamp may feel your kindling touch and know no quenching, may burn for me, and may give light to others. Christ our Saviour, kindle our lamps that they may shine continually in your temple, and receive perpetual light from you, the light perpetual, so that our darkness may be driven from us.

He also wrote,

Let us ever sigh for and desire our homeland: for the end of the road is always the object of travellers' hopes and desires, and so, since we are travellers and pilgrims in this world, let us ever ponder on the end of the road, that is, the end of our life, for the end of our roadway is our home.

If people make correct use of those faculties that God has given to the soul, they will be likened to God. Let us remember that we must restore to God all those gifts he has given us when we were in our original condition. He has taught us the way with his commandments. The first of them tells us to love God with all our heart, because he loved us first, from the beginning of time, even before we came into the light of this world. (*Instruction 11*)

And here are a few of his short sayings: -

‘God resides in us like the soul resides in the body.’  
(Sermon 1.3)

‘Live in Christ so that Christ may live in you.’ (Sermon 10.2)

‘May nothing and no one separate us from the love of Christ – no trial, no difficulty, no persecution, no hunger, no nakedness, no danger, no death by sword, fire, cross or murder, nothing sad, nothing sweet, nothing hard, nothing fair – may none of the world’s vanities separate us from Christ.’ (Sermon 4.3)

‘If you want to know the creator, learn about creation.’

(The above draws in part on a reflection by Pope Benedict XVI on 11 June 2008, who described Columbanus as a “European saint,” saying, ‘He truly became one of the Fathers of Europe.’)

## **SAINT CLEMENT of ROME: 23 November**

Clement was an early bishop of Rome. According to Tertullian, he was ordained by Saint Peter as his immediate successor, but various writers place him second, third or fourth in the list of leaders of the church of Rome. (Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, 36) A common listing of succession is Peter, Linus, Cletus (or Anacletus), and Clement. It is not impossible that he was the Clement that Saint Paul mentions in Philippians 4.3: ‘Clement and the rest of my co-workers whose names are in the book of life,’ though the phrasing suggests that this Clement may then have been dead. The second-century *Shepherd of Hermas* mentions a Clement whose office it was to communicate with other churches; most likely, this is a reference to Clement of Rome since that was a principal role of the bishop of Rome.

Clement's only genuine extant writing is the letter to the Christian community in Corinth, known as 1 Corinthians, written about 96 AD. In it, he gives no indication of his own title or its meaning. It seems that some ‘presbyters’ or ‘bishops’ in Corinth had been deposed - the order of clergy above deacons he designates indifferently by the two terms. He calls for repentance, and for their reinstatement, in line with maintenance of order and obedience to church authority, since the apostles established the ministry of ‘bishops and deacons.’ He mentions overseers/bishops, or elders/presbyters, as the upper rank of minister, served

by deacons. He mentions also 'offering the gifts' (a reference to the Eucharist) as one of the functions of the higher order of clergy. In some congregations, particularly in Egypt, the distinction between bishops and presbyters seems to have become established only later. (By the middle of the second century all the leading Christian centres had bishops.) Most scholars see the letter as fraternal rather than authoritative, indicative of priority rather than primacy, an imperial papacy coming as a later development. It is considered the earliest authentic Christian document outside the New Testament; it was highly regarded, and was read in church at Corinth along with the Scriptures about 170.

The many legends about Clement's life, death and relics have little credibility. The oldest sources, Eusebius and Jerome, say nothing of his being a martyr. The *Liber Pontificalis*, which documents the bishops of Rome, states that Clement knew Saint Peter, and that he died in Greece in 101 AD, while another tradition says that he was exiled to Crimea and drowned by being tied to an anchor and thrown into the sea in 96. Saint Irenaeus of Lyons wrote that Clement, 'had seen the blessed apostles and been conversant with them, and might be said to have their teaching echoing in his ears and their traditions before his eyes.' (*Adversus Haereses*, 3.3.3)

Clement is quoted as having said about the human body, 'We ought not to be ashamed of what God was not ashamed to create.' In a different context, he also wrote, 'Through Christ we see as in a mirror the spotless and excellent face of God.'

Here are some quotations from his *Letter to the Corinthians*: - 'Let not the person who is chaste in body pride himself on the fact. For he knows that it is to someone else that he is indebted for the gift of continence.' (38.2)

'The greater cannot exist without the lesser, nor the small without the great. (37)

'Let us fix our eyes on Christ's blood and understand how precious it is to his Father, for, poured out for our salvation, it has brought to the whole world the grace of repentance.' (7.4)

Clement wrote a prayer for politicians: -

Grant to them, Lord, health, peace, concord and stability, so that they may exercise without offence the sovereignty you have given them. Master, heavenly King of the ages, you give glory, honour and power over the things of the earth to human beings. Direct, Lord, their counsel, following what is pleasing and acceptable in your sight, so that by exercising with devotion and in peace and gentleness the power that you have given them, they may find favour with you.' (*Letter to the Corinthians*, 61)

Other prayers also attributed to him include: -

'O God, make us children of quiet and heirs of peace.'

God almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, grant us, we pray you, to be grounded and settled in your truth by the coming down of the Holy Spirit into our hearts. What we do not know, reveal to us; what is missing, fill up in us; what we know, may you confirm; and keep us blameless in your service; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We ask you, Lord, to be our helper and protector. Save the afflicted among us, have mercy on the lowly, raise up the fallen, be present to the needy, heal the ungodly, convert the wanderers of your people; restore the lost, feed the hungry, ransom the wrongly imprisoned, raise up the sick and comfort the faint-hearted. Amen.

We thank you, Lord God, for all who have worked to build up the house of faith on the sure foundation of the apostles, setting up this sheltering home in every land where people live, showing people, to all of whom you have given the gift of intelligence, the gospel of your Son Jesus Christ which leads them in simple, quiet ways. We thank you for those who have preached your gospel before hostile rulers, or vindicated your teaching before unjust judges, and who, by doing so, have brought light and guidance to darkened lands. We thank you for all those who, through their sacrifices, have brought an end to hardship and sufferings for your people, and sometimes, by shedding their blood, freed them from oppression. By their prayers on our behalf, grant us also to lead clean and blameless lives, chaste, and undisturbed by fear. Amen.



## **THE MARTYRS OF VIET-NAM: 24 November SAINT ANDREW DUNG-LAC and Companions**

Christianity came to Viet-Nam, then three separate kingdoms, through the Portuguese. Jesuits opened the first permanent mission at Da Nang in 1615, ministering to Japanese Catholics who had been driven from Japan.

The king of one of the kingdoms banned all foreign missionaries and tried to make Catholic Viet-Nameese deny their faith by trampling on a crucifix. Like the priest-holes during persecution in England, hiding places were offered to priests in homes of the faithful.

Severe persecutions were launched three times in the nineteenth century. During the six decades after 1820, between one and three hundred thousand Catholics were subjected to great hardship, or killed. Persecution broke out in 1847 when the emperor suspected foreign missionaries and Viet-Nameese Christians of sympathizing with a rebellion led by one of his sons.

The names of one hundred and seventeen people who were martyred in Viet-Nam between 1820 and 1862 are known to us. They were ninety-six Viet-Nameese men and women, eleven Spanish Dominicans and ten French missionaries. The last of them were seventeen laypeople, one a child of just nine years, executed in 1862. That year a treaty with France guaranteed religious freedom to Catholics, but it did not stop all persecution.

Trần An Dũng was born in 1795. He took the name Andrew at his baptism, and was ordained priest on 15 March 1823. During persecution, he changed his name to Lạc to try to avoid capture, but he was captured nonetheless and beheaded on 21 December 1839. On his memorial day the church celebrates all the martyrs of Viet-Nam from 1625 to 1886.

By 1954, there were one and a half million Catholics in the north of Viet-Nam. Persistent persecution forced some 670,000 of them to abandon land, homes and possessions and flee south. In 1964, there were still 833,000 Catholics in the north, but many were in prison. In the south, Catholics were enjoying the first decade of religious freedom in centuries, their numbers swelled by refugees. During the recent war – Viet-Nameese call it “the American war”- Catholics suffered in the north, and again moved to the south in large numbers. Since 1975, the whole country is under Communist rule. Life for all Christians is difficult, and growing more so.

**SAINT CATHERINE OF ALEXANDRIA:  
25 November**

According to traditional accounts, Catherine was the daughter of a pagan king and queen who ruled Alexandria in the fourth century. She was very intelligent and received an exceptionally well-rounded education. Although raised a pagan, she became a Christian in her early teens, having received a vision in which the Blessed Virgin Mary gave her to Christ in mystical marriage. Having decided to remain a virgin all her life, she announced that she would marry only someone who surpassed her in beauty, intelligence, wealth, and dignity. This was interpreted as a foreshadowing of her eventual discovery of Christ.

It is said that as a young woman, she visited the Roman Emperor Maxentius, and attempted to dissuade him from persecuting Christians. He arranged for the best pagan philosophers to dispute with her, but she won the debate. Several of her adversaries, persuaded by her arguments, declared themselves Christians and were put to death.

Catherine herself was scourged and imprisoned. Many people came to try and persuade her to abandon the faith, but she instead converted them to it. Offers of marriage she simply spurned. After many tortures, including an attempt to break her body on a spiked wheel, (which later gave its name to a firework), failed to persuade her,

Maxentius finally had her beheaded, some time in the early fourth century.

Most historians dismiss the above as a fabrication, adding that there is no evidence she even existed. They suggest that her story was invented by way of Christian response to the pagan woman philosopher, Hypatia of Alexandria (c.360-415). The earliest accounts of Catherine's martyrdom come from six centuries after her alleged death. Her feast-day was suppressed with the revision of the Roman calendar in 1969, but restored in 2011.

Christine Walsh, in her book *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe* writes,

... the cult of St Katherine of Alexandria probably originated in oral traditions from the 4th-century Diocletianic persecutions of Christians in Alexandria. There is no evidence that Katherine herself was a historical figure and she may well have been a composite drawn from memories of women persecuted for their faith. Many aspects of her *Passio* are clearly legendary and conform to well-known hagiographical topoi. (Ashgate Publishing, Burlington, 2007, p.143)

In the Sinai desert in Egypt, there is an Orthodox monastery bearing her name, although it was originally dedicated to the Transfiguration. It is said to have been built by Emperor Justinian on the place where Moses saw the burning bush (Exodus 3.1-6), and is to this day a

place of pilgrimage for people from all over the world. The development of her cult in medieval times was spurred by the reported re-discovery of her body around the year 800 at Mount Sinai - brought there, it was said, by angels - with hair still growing and a constant stream of healing oil issuing from her body. Pilgrims to her monastery on Mount Sinai are given a ring, which has been placed on her relics as a blessing in remembrance of their visit.

Catherine was one of the most important saints in the religious culture of the late Middle Ages, and perhaps the most important of the virgin martyrs, a group which included Agnes, Margaret of Antioch, Barbara, Lucy, Valerie of Limoges among many others. Her power as an intercessor was renowned and firmly established in most versions of her life, in which she specifically entreats Christ at the moment of her death to answer the prayers of those who remember her martyrdom and invoke her name. Because of her scholarship she became patron saint of philosophers, theologians, preachers and writers. Colleges in Oxford and Cambridge Universities, along with a lunar crater, have been named in her honour.

For centuries Catherine was upheld not only as an intercessor but as an example of chastity for young women to follow (as was Saint Nicholas of Myra for bachelors). She enjoyed immense popularity and was a topic of sermons by preachers such as Bossuet. In France, where she was said to have advised Saint Joan of Arc, her feast-day was a holy day of obligation until the seventeenth century. One of the first Catholic churches

to be built in Russia was named after her because she was the patron of Empress Catherine the Great.

## SAINT ANDREW, APOSTLE: 30 November

Andrew was one of the twelve apostles. His name, which means *manly*, appears, like other Greek names, to have been common among Jews from the third or second century BC. No Hebrew or Aramaic name is recorded for him.

The New Testament states that Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter, by which it is inferred that he was a son of John, or Jonah. (Matthew 16.19; John 1.42) He was born in Bethsaida on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. (John 1.44) He and his brother Peter were fishermen by trade; hence the tradition that Jesus called them to be his disciples by saying that he would make them 'fishers of men.' (Matthew 4.19) At the beginning of Jesus' public life, they were said to have occupied the same house at Capernaum. (Mark 1.21-29)

The gospel of John states that Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, whose testimony first led him and another disciple to follow Jesus and to spend a day with him. (John 1.35-40) The Orthodox tradition calls Andrew *protokletos*, meaning, the first-called. Clearly, Andrew was a seeker, looking for the hope of Israel. When the Baptist pointed to Jesus as 'the Lamb of God,' (John 1.36) Andrew became the first to follow him and then hurried to introduce his brother to him, (John 1.41) so that they both became disciples of Jesus. Later on, they were called to a closer companionship, and they left

all things to follow him. (Luke 5.11; Matthew 4.19-20; Mark 1.17-18)

In the gospels, Andrew is referred to as being present on some important occasions, as one of the disciples more closely attached to Jesus. (Mark 13.3; John 6.8, 12.22) But in Acts there is only one mention of him. (1.13)

Eusebius quotes Origen as saying that Andrew preached the Gospel along the Black Sea as far as the Volga, Kiev, and Novgorod. Hence he became patron saint of Ukraine, Romania and Russia. According to tradition, he founded the see of Constantinople in 38 AD. Hippolytus of Rome says he preached in Thrace, and his presence in Byzantium is also mentioned in the apocryphal *Acts of Andrew*, written in the second century. This diocese later became the patriarchate of Constantinople, and Andrew its patron saint.

According to an unreliable tradition, Andrew is said to have been crucified in the city of Patras in Greece in 68 AD. Early texts, such as the *Acts of Andrew*, describe him as bound, not nailed, to a Latin cross of the kind on which Jesus was crucified. A later tradition held that he had been crucified on an X-shaped cross, or "saltire", now commonly known as a "Saint Andrew's Cross" - reputedly at his own request, as he deemed himself unworthy to be crucified on the same type of cross as Jesus. But the Saint Andrew's cross as we know it appeared for the first time in the tenth century, and did



not become a standard of iconography before the seventeenth. The Saltire is the national flag of Scotland.

The *Acts of Andrew*, and a *Gospel of Andrew*, probably dating from the late second century, were rejected as apocryphal in the *Decretum Gelasianum* linked to Pope Gelasius I.

Since the tenth or eleventh centuries, the Orthodox church of Georgia regards Andrew as its founder. The story of his mission there endowed the Georgian church with apostolic origin and served as an argument against encroachments by the church of Antioch. (A similar process took place in Armenia where spiritual descent is claimed from the apostles Bartholomew and Jude Thaddaeus.) A Georgian monk, Ephraem the Minor, produced a thesis reconciling Saint Andrew's story with earlier evidence of a fourth-century conversion of Georgians by Saint Nino, and explaining the necessity of the "second Christening" by Nino. This thesis was made canonical by a Georgian church council in 1103.

The official stance of the Romanian Orthodox Church is that Saint Andrew preached the Gospel to the Daco-Romans of Scythia. Some ancient Christian symbols found carved in a cave near Constantia harbour have been used to argue that the Orthodox Church has been the defender of the Romanian people for all of its history.

Early Christian history in Ukraine holds that Andrew preached along the Black Sea. Legend has it that he travelled up the Dnieper River and reached the future location of Kiev, where he erected a cross on the site where the church in his name now stands, and prophesied the foundation of a great Christian city, the Jerusalem of the Russian land. It was in the interest of Kievan Rus and its later Russian and Ukrainian successors to link themselves with the political and religious heritage of Byzantium, by claiming direct contact with an apostle.

Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland, Ukraine, Romania, and Russia. His feast is observed on November 30 in both the Eastern and Western churches, and is the national day of Scotland.

## **SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER: 3 December**

Francis Xavier was born into a family of minor nobility in the Basque country of the then kingdom of Navarra, Spain, in 1506. Much of his early life was overshadowed by a war lasting eighteen years, which led to Navarra being incorporated into Spain. (Francis' family had wanted it linked to France.) Francis' father died when he was only nine years old. In the same year, the family's lands were confiscated, and much of their property, including their home, destroyed, on the orders of Cardinal Cisneros, the governor of Castile.

At the age of nineteen, Francis went to study in Paris. There he met Ignatius of Loyola, who became his companion. With Ignatius and five others, he co-founded the Society of Jesus. In 1534, in Paris, they professed vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and also to convert Muslims in the Middle East, or, failing this, to carry out the wishes of the pope. Francis was ordained priest in 1537.

Leaving Rome for India in 1541 – he had not volunteered but was sent - he took with him a breviary, a catechism, and the book, *De Institutione Bene Vivendi*, which was popular in the Counter-Reformation. According to a letter of F. Balthasar in Goa, it was the only book Francis studied. Francis wrote to a fellow missionary,

‘If you wish to bring forth much fruit, both for yourselves and for your neighbours, converse with sinners, making them unburden themselves to you. These are the living books by which you are to study, both for your preaching and for your own consolation. I do not say that you should not on occasion read written books . . . to support what you say against vices with authorities from the Holy Scriptures and examples from the lives of the saints.’

He led a mission to Asia, mainly to Portuguese territories. His mission, as ordered by the king of Portugal and the pope, was primarily to restore the Christian faith among Portuguese settlers. Disappointed with their unchristian manner of life, he turned to the local people. In 1542, while living in a sea cave, he began work among pearl-fishers of the south-eastern coast of India, building nearly forty churches. He also visited Sri Lanka, several islands of Indonesia, Borneo in Malaysia, Japan, and other areas not been previously visited by missionaries. His work in eastern Indonesia laid the foundations for a permanent mission there. After he left, others carried on his work.

In Malacca, Malaysia, in 1547, Francis met a Japanese named Anjiro, who had fled Japan, having been charged with murder. Anjiro told Francis about his former life and about the customs and culture of his homeland. He helped him as a mediator and translator for a mission to Japan that then seemed possible. Francis wrote,

I asked whether the Japanese would become Christian if I went with him to his country; he replied that they would not do so immediately, but would first ask me many questions and see what I knew. Above all, they would want to see whether my life corresponded with my teaching.

Anjiro became the first Japanese Christian and adopted the name of Paulo de Santa Fe.

Francis reached Kagoshima, Japan, in 1549, with Anjiro and three other Jesuits. He was received by the local ruler in a friendly manner as a representative of the Portuguese king. But, the following year, the ruler forbade conversion to Christianity under penalty of death. Christians could not be given any catechism in the following years. The Portuguese missionary Pedro de Alcacova would later write, 'In Kagoshima, there is a good number of Christians, although there is no one there to teach them; the shortage of missionaries has prevented the whole kingdom from becoming Christian.'

Francis brought with him paintings of the Madonna and Child. These he used to help teach the Japanese about Christianity. There was a large language barrier, as Japanese was unlike other languages the missionaries had encountered. Francis struggled to learn it, but had to limit himself to reading aloud a translation of a catechism. He had been welcomed by local monks since he used the Japanese word *Dainichi* for the Christian God, attempting to adapt the concept to local traditions. As he learned more about the nuances of the word, he

changed it to *Deusu* from the Latin *Deus*. The monks came to realize that Xavier was preaching a different religion, and became hostile towards him. He worked in Japan for more than two years, and saw his successor-Jesuits established. But persecution followed, and the Christians of Japan were forced underground and developed a separate Christian culture.

In his lifetime, as part of his missionary activity, he referred to pagans as devil-worshippers, and asked the king of Portugal to establish the Inquisition:

The second necessity for the Christians is that Your Majesty establish the Holy Inquisition in Goa because there are many who live according to the Jewish Law and the Mohammedan sect, without any fear of God or shame of the world. And since there are many Hindus who are spread all over the fortresses, there is need of the Holy Inquisition, and of many preachers. Your Majesty should provide such necessary things for your loyal and faithful subjects in the Indies.

He said,

Following their baptism, the new Christians return home and come back with their wives and families to be in their turn also prepared for baptism. After all have been baptised, I order that everywhere the temples of the false gods be pulled down and idols broken. I know not how to describe in words the joy I feel before the spectacle of pulling down and

destroying the idols by the very people who formerly worshipped them.

One day when he heard that idols had been worshipped in the house of a Christian, he ordered the house burnt down as a warning to others.

He did not present Christianity through the traditions of the local religion, or try to create a local church, as did later Jesuits like Roberto de Nobili in India or Matteo Ricci in China. They attempted to convert the nobility first as a means to influence the people, while Francis worked mostly with children and the poor. This was a major obstacle to work among dominant caste people. The *Bhagavad Gita* (1.41-42), among other Hindu texts, states that hell is the lot of those who disturb the caste system. Later, though, in Japan, he seems to have changed direction and begun to adopt the others' policy.

Assessments of his missionary work are difficult. Some have criticized him as a man who covered too much ground, in insufficient depth, and that he created unnecessary and avoidable problems for his successors by leaving behind large numbers of people baptized without conversion and with only minimal catechesis. His inadequate knowledge of local languages led to confusion of religious terminology, for example, regarding the translation of the word *God*. They see his canonization as recognition of the man but not as endorsement of his missionary methods. But others see him as a pioneer who opened the door for others.

Francis was isolated and lonely for much of his life. He was seen by his contemporaries as a failure. His family felt he had let them down by not pursuing a career in a diocese. His university considered him a fool for having given up a professorship in Paris to follow Ignatius Loyola, a newcomer with odd ideas, they said. In his missionary work, people said he was impulsive, starting many things but finishing none of them. There were endless internal quarrels among the Jesuits about jurisdiction and who was in charge of what, and communication with their leadership in Europe was often slow and haphazard. This was to cripple their efforts and cause great frustration to Francis. His response was usually to go off and start something new, and that, too, would end in failure.

Francis began work in China, but died on the island of Sancian, near Guangdong, on 3 December 1552, while waiting for a boat to take him to the mainland. He was canonized in 1622, along with Ignatius Loyola, and is a patron saint of Catholic missionaries. He was enthusiastic for spreading the faith and made great personal sacrifice in its service. If a saint is someone who never stops trying, Francis was such a one.



## **SAINT JOHN of DAMASCUS: 4 December**

Saints Luke the Evangelist, John Chrysostom, Ephraem the deacon, Ignatius of Antioch and John Damascene are among the Syrian saints remembered in the Roman calendar. They bear witness to the antiquity of the Christian faith in Syria. 'It was at Antioch [in Syria] that the disciples were first called Christians' (Acts 11.26), and Matthew's Gospel may have been written there. (This was more than five centuries before the birth, in 570, of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam.) Saint Peter the apostle is said to have been its first bishop, and, in terms of its influence in the early days of the Christian church, it was second in place only to Jerusalem; it was widely recognized as a centre of scholarship.

John (Yahya) Mansour was born in Damascus about the middle of the seventh century. He came from a family which was prominent in the administration of the Byzantine Empire. He may have been an Arab, but that is uncertain. He lived at an eventful time in the history of the region. Muslim armies from Arabia advanced north towards Syria and captured Damascus. It has been said that John first regarded Muslims as a Christian sect, only later coming to see them as a distinct religion.

His father, grand-father, and many other Christian civil servants continued to work in their old positions under their new Muslim rulers, the Umayyad Caliphs, but it seems unlikely that John himself served there. His

writings never refer to experience in a Muslim court, and he is not mentioned in the Muslim sources which refer to his father and grandfather. It seems that when John was still relatively young, moves had begun to Islamicize the Caliphate's administration.

John knew Greek, and maybe Arabic. He is said to have made great advances in music, astronomy and theology, rivalling Pythagoras in arithmetic and Euclid in geometry. A friend, an orphan called Cosmas, who had been educated in the West, brought with him the scholarly traditions of Western Christianity. John's fields of interest and contribution, in addition to the above, included law and philosophy.

It is believed that he became a monk at Mar Saba monastery near Jerusalem, and was ordained priest in 735. While there, iconoclasm, a movement opposed to the veneration of icons, gained some acceptance in the Byzantine court. In 726, despite the protests of the patriarch of Constantinople, Emperor Leo III issued his first edict against the veneration of images and their exhibition in public places. John undertook a vigorous defence of them in three publications. The earliest of these, his *Apologetic Treatises against those decrying the Holy Images*, secured his reputation. He wrote in a simple style that allowed the controversy to be followed by ordinary people, stirring rebellion among those of Christian faith. Later, his writings would play an important role during the second Council of Nicaea, which convened to settle the dispute. He wrote,

Previously, God, who has neither a body nor a face, absolutely could not be represented by an image. But now that he has made himself visible in the flesh and has lived among people, I can make an image of what I have seen of God... and contemplate the glory of the Lord, his face unveiled. (*On the Holy Images*, 1.16; PG 96.1245-1248)

In the same work, John wrote against those who saw the material and the physical as opposed to the spiritual, ‘I shall not cease to venerate matter, for it was through matter that my salvation came about. Do not insult matter, for it is not without honour; nothing that God has made is without honour.’ (*On the Holy Images*, 1.16)

John left behind a substantial body of writings. One of his works, called the *Fountain of Knowledge*, is in three parts: the first, the *Dialectic*, is a study of logic, helping the reader to think clearly; the second, *Concerning Heresy*, is an extended critique of Islam especially, but also of other groups; and, thirdly, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, a summary of the dogmatic writings of the early church Fathers. This was the first work of Scholasticism in Eastern Christianity and an important influence on later Scholastic works. He compiled the *Sacra Parallela*, a compendium, now mostly lost, of scriptural and patristic texts on the moral and ascetical life. He also wrote hymns and a Eucharistic prayer. One hymn, ‘Come, ye faithful, raise the strain of triumphant gladness...’ is still widely used today.

Not all his writings were of a high standard. He wrote, 'Woman is a sick she-ass... a hideous tapeworm... the advance post of hell.' Did he include his mother in that description?

John also wrote about the assumption of Mary into heaven at the end of her life. Of her parents, he said, 'O blessed couple, all creation is in your debt, for through you is presented the noblest of gifts to the creator, namely, a spotless mother who alone was worthy of the creator.' In 1950, Pope Pius XII, in a document defining the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary, described John as 'more than all others the outstanding preacher of this traditional doctrine.' (*Munificentissimus Deus*, n.23)

John died at Mar Saba on 4 December 749. He is sometimes called the last of the church Fathers, and, in 1883, was declared a doctor of the church, being sometimes known as the doctor of the assumption.

Here are some extracts from his writings: -

'The name "He who Is" is the most appropriate of all the divine names.' (*On the orthodox Faith*, 1.9)

'The knowledge of the existence of God is implanted [by God] in our nature.' (*On the orthodox Faith*, 1.1)

'Prayer is a gift God gives to those who pray.'

## **SAINT NICHOLAS: 6 December**

The sixth of December is the day on which most people on the mainland of Europe give each other presents. The origin of this is unusual: it is the feast of Saint Nicholas, though next to nothing is known about him with certainty.

He may have been of Greek origin and born about the middle of the fourth century in the town of Patara in Lycia, near the town of Demre in modern Turkey. It is said that he became bishop of Myra, and was imprisoned during the persecutions by the Roman emperor Diocletian, but was released by his successor, Constantine. It is also said that he attended the first Council of Nicaea, convoked by Constantine, and to have spoken against Arianism, but his name does not appear on any of the lists of attendees.

Legend says that he helped people in distress, particularly women who were unable to marry because of having no dowries; he provided them discreetly. His cult became popular and very widespread from the tenth century, and he is patron saint of Russia, sailors and children.

In Mediterranean countries, he is known as San Nicolaus. Say San Nicolaus, then repeat it quickly two or three times, and you'll find that you're saying something very like Santa Claus. Santa Claus is the commercialized embodiment of San Nicolaus.

The feast of Saint Nicholas has suffered the fate of practically every major Christian feast: it has been commercialized, and at least partly secularized. But perhaps we Christians shouldn't expect the commercial world to do our celebrating for us; it dances to its own tune. There is a lot of good in giving, especially to those in greatest need, and to celebrating Christmas in a Christian way. Part of that is to observe Advent, to make the celebration of Christmas simple, to value presence above presents, to simply be with relatives and friends, to enjoy each other's company, and to be grateful for it.

## **SAINT AMBROSE: 7 December**

Ambrose was born into a Roman Christian family about 340, and raised in Trier, Germany. His father was the praetorian prefect of Gaul, his mother a woman of intellect and piety.

After his father's early death, Ambrose followed him in his career. He was educated in Rome, studying literature, law, and rhetoric. About 372, he was made governor of Liguria and Emilia, with headquarters at Milan, which was then (after Rome) the second capital in Italy. At that time, there was deep conflict in the diocese of Milan between Catholics and Arians. Arianism implicitly denied the divinity of Christ. In 374, the Arian bishop of Milan, Auxentius, died, and the Arians challenged the succession. As governor, Ambrose went to the church where the election was to take place, to prevent an uproar, which seemed likely. His address was interrupted by a call 'Ambrose for bishop!' which was then taken up by the whole assembly.

Ambrose was known to be Catholic in belief, but also acceptable to Arians due to the kindness he had shown. At first, he refused the office, for which he was in no way prepared: he was neither baptized nor trained in theology, and he was married. He fled to a colleague's home to hide. But, upon receiving a letter from the Emperor Gratian praising the appropriateness of Rome appointing individuals evidently worthy of holy

positions, Ambrose's host gave him up. Within a week, Ambrose was baptized and ordained bishop of Milan.

As bishop, he immediately adopted an ascetic lifestyle, apportioned his money to the poor, donating all his land, making provision only for his sister Marcellina, and committing the care of his family to his brother, Satyrus. He studied the Hebrew Bible and Greek authors like Philo, Origen, Athanasius, and Basil of Caesarea, with whom he exchanged letters. He applied this knowledge as preacher, concentrating especially on the Old Testament. His rhetorical abilities impressed Augustine of Hippo, who hitherto had thought poorly of Christian preachers.

According to legend, Ambrose immediately and forcefully stopped Arianism in Milan. He sought to refute their propositions theologically, but the issue was highly politicized, with emperors taking one side or the other, and bishops and priests sometimes engaging in immoral, even violent, moves against their opponents. Ambrose prevailed upon Emperor Gratian to call a council at Aquileia in 381. He addressed it, won it over, and expelled his opponents.

Ambrose's attitude towards Jews is controversial. In 388, a mob, led by the local bishop and many monks, destroyed a synagogue in Mesopotamia. Emperor Theodosius the Great ordered it re-built at the expense of the rioters, including the bishop. Ambrose immediately issued a fiery protest. He wrote to Theodosius that "the



glory of God" was concerned in this matter, and that therefore he could not be silent:

Shall a bishop be compelled to re-erect a synagogue? Can he religiously do this thing? If he obeys the emperor, he will become a traitor to his faith; if he disobeys him, a martyr. What real wrong is there, after all, in destroying a synagogue, which is a home of perfidy, a home of impiety, in which Christ is daily blasphemed?

He went on to declare his wish that 'all synagogues be destroyed, that no such places of blasphemy be further allowed to exist.' In the end, he succeeded in obtaining from Theodosius a promise that the sentence be completely revoked. The consequence was that the immunity thus afforded occasioned destruction of synagogues all over the empire.

Ambrose frequently found himself in conflict with Roman emperors over political issues. He was a tough, uncompromising fighter, and usually won. In 390, he excommunicated Emperor Theodosius I for a massacre he had carried out. At his instigation, emperors Gratian, Valentinian II and Theodosius I persecuted paganism and outlawed its practice.

He died on 4 April 397. His body may be viewed in the church named after him in Milan. One of his sayings is, 'What the mouth speaks, let the mind confess within; what the tongue utters, let the heart feel.' (*On the Mysteries*, 54)

Many elements in Ambrose's life are characteristic of his times. The chief source of his victory over his opponents was his popularity and the respect paid to the office of bishop. But he also used other means to obtain support from the people. He was generous to the poor, and introduced popular reforms in the order of public worship. It is said that at a time when he needed public support in a conflict with the emperor, he found under a church the remains of two martyrs, Gervasius and Protasius. The bodies, although they would have had to have been hundreds of years old, looked as if they had just died. The applause of the people was mixed with the derision of the emperor's supporters.

Ambrose ranks with Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great, as one of the Latin doctors of the church. Theologians compare him with Saint Hilary of Poitiers, who, though lacking Ambrose's administrative ability, demonstrated greater theological capacity. Ambrose became a theologian despite his juridical training and his comparatively late study of Biblical and doctrinal subjects. His spiritual successor, Augustine, whose conversion was helped by his sermons, owes more to him than to any writer except Saint Paul.

Ambrose's intense consciousness of the office of bishop furthered the growing doctrine of the church and its sacerdotal ministry, while the prevalent asceticism of the day, continuing the Stoic and Ciceronian training of his youth, enabled him to promulgate a lofty standard of Christian ethics.

He was flexible in liturgical matters, seeing liturgy as a tool to serve people in worshiping God; it should not become rigid and invariable from place to place. His advice to Augustine of Hippo was to follow local liturgical custom. 'When I am at Rome, I fast on a Saturday; when I am at Milan, I do not. Follow the custom of the church where you are.' He refused to be drawn into a conflict over which local church had the "right" liturgical form, when there was no theological issue at stake. His advice has remained in the English language in the saying, 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do.'

Ambrose had a powerful theology of Mary, which influenced contemporary popes like Damasus, Siricius and, later, Leo the Great. Central to this is Mary's role as Virgin Mother of God. He saw virginity as superior to marriage and Mary as the model of virginity.

His writings are substantial. He was influenced by the Greek Fathers, but nevertheless gives a Western cast to the subjects, doctrinal and moral, of which he treats. This is especially clear in the emphasis he lays on human sin and divine grace, and the place he assigns to faith in the Christian life. He wrote commentaries on Saint Luke's Gospel and the Old Testament, on the sacraments, on moral subjects, an exposition of the creed, letters and sermons. Among many hymns, he is traditionally credited with composing the *Te, Deum*, said to have been composed when he baptised Augustine of Hippo, his celebrated convert. He made the singing of hymns a normal feature of the liturgy. His most significant work,

*On the Sacraments*, contains the first Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass.

Here are some extracts from his writings: -

‘We speak to God when we pray; we listen to God when we read the Scriptures.’ (*On the Offices of Ministers*, 1.20; PL 16.50)

‘The Lord wills that his disciples possess a tremendous power: that they accomplish in his name all that he accomplished when he was on earth.’ (*On Penance*, 1.15; PL 16.490)

‘If you receive the [eucharistic] bread each day.... Christ is yours each day, for he rises for you every day.’ (*On the Sacraments*, 5.4.26; PL 16.453a)

‘Those who entrust themselves to God do not fear evil, for, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”’ (*On the Sacraments*, 5.4.30; PL 16.454 and Romans 8.31)

‘Riches are the beginning of all vice, because they enable us to carry out even our most vicious desires.’

‘Do not limit fasting merely to abstaining from food, for a true fast means refraining from evil. Loose every unjust bond, put away your resentment against your neighbour, forgive them their offences. Do not let your fasting lead to wrangling and strife. You do not eat meat, but you devour your neighbour; you abstain from wine, but not from insults. So all the labour of your fast is

useless.’ (This quotation is also attributed to Saint Basil the Great, *On Fasting*, 1.10. It seems the saints sometimes cogged, as with, ‘God became man that man might become God.’ (Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54.3 and Augustine, Sermon 13, *On the Nativity of the Lord*)

**SAINT JUAN DIEGO CUAUHTLATOATZIN:  
9 December**

Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin is the first indigenous canonized American saint. He is said to have been granted apparitions of the Virgin Mary on four occasions in December 1531 at the hill of Tepeyac, then outside, but now within Mexico City. The Basilica of Guadalupe located at the foot of the hill of Tepeyac possesses what is claimed to be Juan Diego's cloak (or *tilma*) on which an image of the Virgin is said to have been impressed by a miracle, as a pledge of the authenticity of the apparitions. These apparitions, and the imparting of the miraculous image, are the basis of the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe which is widespread in the Spanish-speaking world and beyond. The Basilica of Guadalupe now receives more than twenty million pilgrims a year.

According to tradition, Juan Diego was a local man, an Indian, born into modest circumstances in 1474. He and his wife, María Lucia, were among the first to be baptized after the arrival of the main group of twelve Franciscan missionaries in Mexico in 1524. Various traditions have arisen about Juan Diego and Maria Lucia as to whether or not they had a family. It is said that she died about 1529. After the apparitions, Juan Diego lived next to the hermitage erected at the foot of the hill of Tepeyac, and he dedicated the rest of his life to serving the Virgin Mary at the shrine erected in accordance with her wishes. He is reported to have died in 1548.

The story of the apparitions begins with Juan Diego being in the habit of walking from his home to the Franciscan mission station, taking a route which passed by the hill at Tepeyac.

At dawn on Saturday, 9 December 1531, while on his usual journey, he encountered the Virgin Mary, who revealed herself as the Mother of God. She told him to ask the bishop to erect a chapel in her honour so that she might reveal herself as ‘a compassionate mother to you and yours, to my devotees, and to those who will seek me for the relief of their needs.’ He delivered the request, but was told by the bishop, a Franciscan friar, Juan Zumárraga, to come back another day after he had had time to reflect on Juan Diego’s message.

Later the same day, returning to Tepeyac, Juan Diego encountered the Virgin again and announced the failure of his mission, suggesting that because he was a man of no importance she would do better to recruit someone of greater standing. But she insisted that it was he whom she wanted for the task. Juan Diego agreed to return and repeat his request. This he did on the morning of Sunday, 10 December, when he found the bishop more receptive. But Zumárraga asked for a sign to show that the apparition was truly from heaven.

Juan Diego immediately returned to Tepeyac and, encountering the Virgin Mary again, reported the bishop's request for a sign. She agreed to provide one the following day, 11 December. By then, however, Juan Diego's uncle, Juan Bernardino, had fallen ill, and Juan

Diego was obliged to attend to him. In the early hours of Tuesday, 12 December, Juan Bernardino's condition having deteriorated overnight, Juan Diego set out to get a priest to minister to him on his death-bed.

In order to avoid being delayed by the Virgin, and embarrassed at having failed to meet her on the Monday as agreed, Juan Diego chose another route around the hill. But the Virgin intercepted him and asked where he was going. He explained what had happened. The Virgin chided him gently for not having had recourse to her. In words which have become the most famous phrase of the Guadalupe event and which are inscribed over the main entrance to the basilica, she asked: 'Am I not here, I who am your mother?' She assured him that Juan Bernardino had now recovered and she told him to climb the hill and collect flowers growing there. Obeying her, he found an abundance of flowers unseasonably in bloom on the rocky outcrop where only cactus and scrub normally grew. Using his open mantle as a sack, with the ends still tied around his neck, he returned to the Virgin. She rearranged the flowers and told him to take them to the bishop. On gaining admission to the bishop, Juan Diego opened his mantle, the flowers fell to the floor, and the bishop saw they had left on the mantle an imprint of the Virgin's image, which he immediately venerated.

The next day Juan Diego found his uncle fully recovered, as the Virgin had assured him. Juan Bernardino recounted that he too had seen her at his bedside; that she had instructed him to inform the bishop of this apparition and of his cure; and that she had told him



she desired to be known under the title of Guadalupe. The bishop kept Juan Diego's mantle first in his private chapel and then in the church on public display where it attracted great attention. On 26 December 1531, a procession formed taking the miraculous image back to Tepeyac where it was installed in a small hastily erected chapel. In the course of this procession, the first miracle is said to have been performed on an Indian who had been severely wounded in the neck by an arrow shot by accident during some stylized martial displays executed in honour of the Virgin. In great distress, the Indians carried him before the Virgin's image and pleaded for his life. Once the arrow was withdrawn, the victim made an immediate and full recovery.

Juan Diego was declared blessed in 1990 by Pope John Paul II, the requirement for an authenticating miracle having been dispensed with on the grounds of the antiquity of the cult. His fervour and simplicity, his respectful but gracious demeanour towards the Virgin Mary and the initially skeptical bishop, as well as his devotion to his sick uncle, and, subsequently, to the Virgin at her shrine – all of which are central to the tradition – are among his defining characteristics and evidence of his holiness of life. He was canonized in 2002, following approval of a miracle in which a twenty-year-old man, Juan José Barragán Silva, fell ten meters, head first, from an apartment balcony onto concrete in an apparent suicide attempt. His mother had prayed to Juan Diego for his recovery. Despite severe head, neck and spinal injuries, he recovered fully within a week.

There was opposition to the canonization from those who felt that the historical basis for the apparitions was insufficiently established. The main objection centred on the lack of documentation for up to a century or more after the events described, and the absence of evidence from Bishop Zumárraga or other Franciscans. The critics said that the cult had been promoted without prior investigation, had not been subjected to canonical inquiry, and was focussed on a cult object with particular appeal to Indians at a site arguably connected with popular devotion to a pre-Christian female deity. Leading Franciscans were hostile to - or at best suspicious of - Guadalupe throughout the second half of the sixteenth century precisely on the grounds of practices arguably syncretistic or worse. In 1556, the Franciscan provincial, Fray Francisco de Bustamante, publicly rebuked Archbishop Montúfar, Bishop Zumárraga's successor, for promoting the cult. The counter-argument was that every tradition has an initial oral stage where documentation will be lacking. Perhaps also earlier written records have been lost; and absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The controversy intensified when Father Schulenberg, custodian of the shrine of Guadalupe from 1963 to 1996, said that he did not believe Juan Diego was an historical person, or that the cloak said to be his was genuine.

The first written account to be published of the Guadalupe event was a theological statement hailing Mexico as the New Jerusalem and correlating Juan Diego with Moses at Mount Horeb and the Virgin with the mysterious Woman of the Apocalypse in Revelation

12. Entitled *Image of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God of Guadalupe, who miraculously appeared in the City of Mexico*, it was published in Spanish in Mexico City in 1648. The author was a Mexican-born Spanish priest, Miguel Sánchez, who asserted in his introduction that his account of the apparitions was based on documentary sources (though these were few, and only vaguely alluded to) and on an oral tradition which he called ancient, consistent and widespread. He interpreted the Virgin as addressing herself specifically to Indians, while noting that Juan Diego himself regarded all the residents of New Spain as his spiritual heirs, the inheritors of the holy image.

The role of Juan Diego as both representing and confirming the human dignity of the indigenous Indian populations and of asserting their right to claim a place of honour in the New World is part of the earliest narratives.

## **POPE SAINT DAMASUS I: 11 December**

Damasus was born about 305 in Portugal, then the Roman province of Lusitania. His parents were Antonius, who became a priest in the church of Saint Laurence in Rome, and Laurentia; Damasus was raised in Rome. When he was in his twenties, Constantine I rose to rule the Western Roman Empire. He issued the Edict of Milan in 313, granting religious freedom to Christians in all parts of the Roman Empire. But Licinius, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, rejected this in favour of paganism. A civil war resulted in 324 that placed Constantine in control of a re-united empire, and this led to Christian religious supremacy in Constantinople.

When Pope Liberius was banished by Emperor Constantius II in 354, Damasus followed him into exile, though he immediately returned to Rome. (Damasus had remarked on one occasion, 'My will is a canon.')

During the period before Liberius' return, Damasus, now a priest, had a great share in the government of the diocese of Rome.

In the early church, new bishops of Rome were elected or chosen by the clergy and the people of the diocese in the presence of other bishops of the province, as was customary elsewhere. While this worked well in a small community of Christians unified by persecution, as the congregation grew in size, the choice of a new bishop was fraught with potential for division. Rival claimants,

and class hostility between patrician and plebeian candidates, disturbed some elections. In addition, the emperors expected each new bishop-elect to be presented to them for approval, and this sometimes led to attempted or actual state control of the church's internal affairs. (Emperor Constantius II, for example, had remarked on one occasion, 'My will is a canon.')

On the death of Liberius in 366, one faction elected Damasus and another a rival called Ursinus. Supporters of each candidate rioted and massacres ensued, requiring intervention by the emperor to control. Damasus prevailed, but only with the support of the city prefect. Once he was securely in place, his men attacked Ursinus and his remaining supporters who were seeking refuge in a church, resulting in a massacre of 137 of Ursinus' supporters.

Damasus was accused of murder, but his friends secured the intervention of the emperor to rescue him from this. He was also accused of adultery: Edward Gibbon wrote, 'The enemies of Damasus styled him the ladies' ear-scratcher.' (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 25, n. 83) Although these accusations may have come from political or religious enemies, his reputation, and that of the Roman church, suffered greatly.

Damasus' personal problems were in contrast to his religious achievements, which included encouraging his secretary Saint Jerome in his translation of the Bible. This was done to put an end to divergences in the texts

of that period. Jerome revised the available Old Latin versions of the Bible into a more accurate Latin on the basis of the Greek New Testament and the Septuagint, resulting in the Vulgate.

Damasus presided over a council in Rome in 382 which may have set down the canon of Scripture. He also encouraged the veneration of Christian martyrs. While he worked to oppose Arianism and to prevent schism, his relations with the churches of Alexandria, Constantinople and Antioch were often contentious. He also organized the archives of the church of Rome.

During the reign of Emperor Gratian, which overlapped with Damasus' papacy, Catholic Christianity for the first time became dominant throughout the empire. Under the influence of Saint Ambrose, Gratian prohibited pagan worship in Rome and abolished various privileges attached to pagan temples. Damasus welcomed the edict of Theodosius I, *De fide Catholica* of 380, which proclaimed as the religion of the Roman state that doctrine which Saint Peter had preached to the Romans and of which Damasus was head.

Damasus was pope for eighteen years and died in 384. Jerome wrote, 'He had a fine talent for making verses, and he published many brief works in heroic metre. He died in the reign of the emperor Theodosius at the age of almost eighty.' (*On Illustrious Men*, chapter 103)

## SAINT LUCY: 13 December

The oldest record of Lucy's story comes from fifth-century accounts of saints' lives. By the sixth century, her story was widespread, so that she appears in the *Sacramentary* of Pope Gregory I. The details are similar to those of other female martyrs of the early fourth century.

According to these, Saint Lucy (283–304), or Santa Lucia, was a wealthy young Christian, who decided to consecrate her life to God in virginity, and to give away her dowry to the poor. In the culture of Rome and its neighbours, a woman was seen as the property of her father until she married, and of her husband thereafter. Marriages were arranged by parents, usually on the basis of family alliances, in which property considerations had priority, and daughters were part of a package deal. Lucy's decision not to cooperate with her family's plans showed extraordinary courage on her part, though they probably saw it as defiance and rebellion. Her intended husband, angered at her refusal to marry him, denounced her to the Roman authorities. She was put to death in Syracuse, Sicily, during the reign of Emperor Diocletian, at the age of twenty-one. Lucy is venerated as a saint by Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Orthodox Christians, and is remembered in the first Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass.

## **SAINT JOHN of the CROSS: 14 December**

Juan de Yepes y Álvarez was born into a Jewish *converso* family in Fontiveros, near Ávila, Spain, about 1542. His father, Gonzalo, was an accountant to wealthy relatives who were silk merchants. However, in 1529, when he married John's mother, Catalina, who was an orphan of a lower class, Gonzalo was rejected by his family and forced to work with his wife as a weaver. John's father died in 1545, while John was only about three years old. Two years later, his older brother Luis died, caused, it is said, by malnutrition due to the family's poverty. After this, John's mother, Catalina, took John and his surviving brother Francisco, and moved to Medina del Campo, where she was able to find work weaving.

In Medina, John attended a school for poor children, usually orphans, receiving a basic education, mainly in Christian doctrine, as well as food, clothing and lodging. Growing up, John worked at a hospital and studied the humanities at a school run by the newly-founded Jesuits. In 1563, John entered the Carmelite Order and was given the name of John of Saint Mathias. (... of the Cross came later.)

The following year he professed his vows as a Carmelite and travelled to Salamanca, where he studied theology and philosophy at the prestigious University there (at the time, alongside Paris, Oxford and Bologna, one of the four biggest in Europe).



John was ordained a priest in 1567, and then asked to join the Carthusians because of their solitary life of silent contemplation. But Teresa of Ávila, a Carmelite nun intent on reforming the Order, persuaded him to stay with the Carmelites and work for their reform.

Under the “Primitive” or original Carmelite Rule which they adopted, there were long periods of prayer, silence and fasting. The friars also worked to spread the Gospel among the local people where they lived. From their custom of not wearing shoes, they became known as “Discalced” (without shoes). John learned much from Teresa’s example, and founded the first of the reformed houses at Duruelo in 1568. Arising out of a vision of Jesus on the cross, seen from above, John changed his name from John of Saint Mathias to John of the Cross. (His sketch of this vision inspired in 1951 a famous painting by Salvador Dalí, the *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*.)

The new reform movement grew rapidly but was accompanied by much friction and even division. In 1576, a general chapter of the Order directed that all houses of the reform be suppressed. John was arrested by his confreres although released shortly afterwards through the intervention of the papal nuncio. His freedom was short-lived, however, as the nuncio died and he was imprisoned again in 1577.

Brought to trial by Carmelites opposed to the reform, and accused of disobedience, he was sentenced to a weekly public lashing by his religious community,

fasting on bread and water, and imprisonment in a room in the friary which was barely large enough for a person. Windowless, the only light came from a hole into the adjoining room. His diet was bread, water and scraps of salted fish. He was not allowed to wash or change his clothing, and it was said that the friars scraped the tonsure off his head with sea-shells. While there, he wrote most of his poetry, including the *Spiritual Canticle*: -

‘In this blissful night,  
secretly, no man seeing me,  
I, seeing nothing,  
with no other light or guide  
but that which burned in my heart.  
And it led me  
surer than the light of noonday.’

After nine months in prison, he escaped. Then, having some months in hospital recuperating from his imprisonment, John held a meeting of the friars of the reform. They agreed to ask the pope for their separation from the rest of the Carmelite friars. Pope Gregory XIII authorized this in 1580.

What followed for John and his brothers was a time of growth and expansion. He wrote the *Constitutions* of the new Order, and, when it held its first chapter, in 1581, it had twenty-two houses and about three hundred friars. One estimate is that he walked or rode a mule for about 25,000 km on these journeys. He used to sing his poems to the air of popular tunes of the time. In all of this, he

worked closely with Teresa of Ávila, each one helping the other. She died in October 1581.

On one occasion, while in Lisbon, his confreres urged him to visit a stigmatist in the city. He declined, choosing instead to spend time at the sea reading his Bible.

Elected to various offices in the Discalced Friars, John spent much time travelling and founding new houses. He disagreed with some of the decisions of the new General of the Order. As a result, he was removed from office and sent into virtual exile, where he died in 1591 of a skin infection at the age of forty-nine.

After death, his body was dismembered, with his legs and arms being sent to different places as relics. He was canonized in 1726 and declared a doctor of the church in 1926.

The first edition of his writings was published in 1618, although some parts, such as the *Spiritual Canticle*, were omitted, seemingly for fear of the Inquisition, since it was based on the biblical *Song of Songs* and translations of the Bible into the vernacular were forbidden in Spain at the time. John wrote for only a short period of his life, between 1578 and 1591. His poems, especially the *Spiritual Canticle* and the *Dark Night of the Soul* are considered among the finest in the Spanish language for their symbolism, imagery and style. His theological works are sometimes commentaries on the poems. The greatest influence on these writings, and also on his

*Living Flame of Love* and the *Sayings of Light and Love* was the Bible, which he quotes or refers to indirectly many hundreds of times. His writings, including his letters, together with those of Saint Teresa of Ávila, have had great influence on spiritual searchers and writers ever since. With Teresa, John was a prime force in forestalling the Reformation in the Iberian peninsula.

Here are some extracts from his writings: -

‘I would not consider any spirituality worthwhile which wants to walk in sweetness and ease, and run from the imitation of Christ.’

‘Do not seek Christ without the cross.’

‘People... should desire to journey to God by unknowing.’

‘God cannot be encompassed by any form of distinct knowledge.’

‘Do not be like the many foolish ones who, in their lowly understanding of God, think that when they do not understand, taste, or experience God, he is far away and utterly concealed. The contrary belief would be truer.’

‘All heavenly visions, revelations and feelings - or whatever else one may desire to think on - are not worth as much as the least act of humility.’

About pilgrimages: ‘I would never advise going with a large crowd, because one ordinarily returns more distracted than before. Many who go on pilgrimage do so more for the sake of recreation than devotion.’

‘God is never absent, not even from a soul in mortal sin - and how much less from one who is in the state of grace.’

‘Do not go in pursuit of him [God] outside yourself. You will only become distracted and wearied thereby, and you shall not find him, or enjoy him more securely, or sooner, or more intimately than by seeking him within you.’

‘Nothing is obtained from God except by love.’

‘Everything I say [about God] is as far from the reality as is a painting from the living object represented.’

‘In the first place it should be known that if anyone is seeking God, the Beloved is seeking that person much more.’

‘To possess God in all, you should possess nothing in all. For how can the heart that belongs to one belong completely to the other?’

‘Where there is no love, pour love in, and you will draw love out...’

‘Our greatest need is to be silent before this great God with the appetite and with the tongue, for the only language God hears is the silent language of love.’

‘Do not fail to pray when you can.’

‘If anything is lacking, it is not writing or speaking (for generally there is a surfeit of these anyway), but silence and work.’

‘When the evening of life comes, we will be examined in love.’

## **SAINT PETER CANISIUS: 21 December**

Peter Canisius, in Dutch Pieter Kanis, was born in 1521 in Nijmegen in the Netherlands. His father, Jacob, was the city mayor; his mother, Ægidia, died shortly after his birth. He studied at the University of Cologne in Germany, where he earned a master's degree at the age of nineteen with the intention of becoming a lawyer. While there, he met Saint Peter Faber, one of the founders of the Society of Jesus, and, through him, became, in 1543, the first Dutchman to join the newly-founded Society.

Through his preaching and writing, Peter became one of the most influential teachers of his time. He supervised the founding of the first German-speaking Jesuit colleges - often with few resources. He preached widely in Germany, Bohemia, Moravia, Austria, and Switzerland, and is said to have attracted hundreds of Protestants to the Catholic faith. He achieved so much that he became known as the second Apostle of Germany.

Peter also exerted strong influence on the German Emperor Ferdinand I, constantly reminding him of the danger to his soul should he concede more rights to Protestants. When Peter saw a danger that Ferdinand's son and heir, Maximilian, might declare himself a Protestant, he threatened him with dis-inheritance if he did so.

Peter was an influential teacher and preacher, especially through his *German Catechism*, a book which set out the basic teachings of the faith in a question-and-answer format of 211 questions. Published in 1555, it went through a hundred and thirty editions. Two shorter versions helped reach a wider audience. In 1554, he was offered the post of archbishop of Vienna, but declined in order to continue his traveling and teaching. He did, however, serve as administrator of the diocese of Vienna for a year, until a new archbishop was appointed.

By the time he left Germany, the Society of Jesus had evolved from a small band of priests into a powerful instrument of the Counter-Reformation. Peter spent the last twenty years of his life in Fribourg, Switzerland, where he founded a Jesuit preparatory school that trained generations of young men for careers and future university studies.

Peter lived at the height of the Protestant Reformation and dedicated much of his work to the clarification of the Catholic faith in light of the emergence of Protestant doctrines. In his contest with German Protestantism, he requested much more flexibility from Rome, saying,

‘If you treat them right, the Germans will give you everything. Many err in matters of faith, but without arrogance. They err the German way, mostly honest, a bit simple-minded, but very open to everything Lutheran. An honest explanation of the faith will be much more effective against reformers than a polemical attack.’



Courtesy and scholarship were characteristics of his. He rejected the idea of attacks on Lutheran leaders, saying, 'With angry words, we don't cure patients; we make them incurable.'

Peter had strong devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus. He saw her as the best of many ways to Jesus, and constantly recommended devotion to her. He is credited with adding to the *Hail Mary* the sentence, 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death'; this led to its inclusion in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*. He published many prayers and texts about Mary.

In 1591, he suffered a stroke which left him partially paralysed, but he continued to preach, and to write with the aid of a secretary until his death on 21 December 1597, at the age of seventy-six. Peter was canonized and declared a doctor of the church in 1925.

## SAINT JOHN of KANTY: 23 December

John Kanty, or Cantius, was born on 23 June 1390 in Kanty, a small town near Oświęcim, (in German, Auschwitz), in the diocese of Krakow, Poland, to Stanislaus and Anna Kanty. He attended the Krakow Academy, from which he graduated with a doctorate in philosophy. He then spent the next three years preparing for the priesthood.

Not long after ordination, having spent some time in parish ministry, he became professor of scripture at the Jagellonian University, and remained there until his death. He was also a philosopher and physicist. In physics, he helped develop a theory of *impetus*, which anticipated the work of Galileo and Newton.

John was noted throughout his life for his good humour, humility and charity. He subsisted only on what was necessary to sustain life, giving alms regularly to the poor. He made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with the desire of becoming a martyr among the Turks, and four pilgrimages to Rome, all on foot. The medieval Polish historian and John's first biographer, Michael Miechowita, described his great humility and charity.

John died while living in retirement at his old college on 24 December 1473, aged 83. His remains were interred in the church of Saint Anne, Krakow, where his tomb remains a popular pilgrimage site.

Throughout his life, various miracles were attributed to him. He was named patron of Poland and Lithuania in 1737, and was canonized in 1767.

## SAINT STEPHEN: 26 December

Stephen was the first person known to die for the Christian faith. His name is Greek and he was probably of Greek origin. His name derives from the Greek *stephanos*, meaning *crown*. (From this, people speak of “the crown of martyrdom.”) He was one of the seven chosen as deacons to exercise a ministry of care for the needy as well as preaching. (Acts 6.1-6) The *Acts of Apostles* describe him as ‘a man of good reputation,’ one ‘full of faith and of the Holy Spirit,’ and one ‘filled with grace and power who began to work miracles and great signs among the people.’ (6.3, 5, 8)

The account of his trial and death, which took place about the year 34 or 35, is in chapters 6 and 7 of *Acts*. Underlying the controversy was the issue of relations between Palestinian and Greek converts from Judaism, an issue that took a generation to resolve. His trial parallels that of Jesus in several respects: - false witnesses, an accusation of blasphemy, an element of mob “justice,” and, in the end, a good man unjustly put to death out of expediency, a Christian disciple following Christ.

Stephen was accused before the Sanhedrin, the council of Israel’s religious leaders, by other Greek Jews of blaspheming against Moses and God (6.11), and speaking against the Temple and the Torah. (6.13–14) There was no evidence that he had spoken against God or Moses, despite the ‘false witnesses’ that had been

‘procured.’ (6.11, 13) Stephen probably had predicted the destruction of the Temple, as Jesus himself had done, and a change in understanding the Torah, as Paul was later to do, and denied any special significance to the land of Israel. Such was part of the preaching of the early converts to Christianity among Jews of the Diaspora. He also accused the Jewish leaders of persecuting prophets, saying, ‘Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed the ones who prophesied the coming of the Just One, and now you have become his betrayers, his murderers.’ (7.52) Acts says that, ‘They were infuriated when they heard this, and ground their teeth at him.’ (7.54) But what he had said was true; they had done so.

While the high priest had begun by asking Stephen the right question, ‘Is this true?’ (7.1), in reference to the accusations made against him, he and his colleagues in the Sanhedrin did not examine what Stephen had said and done on the basis of truth or justice. They politicized the issue, judging it on the basis of institutional self-protectiveness. It seems they felt that if they allowed Stephen to continue speaking as he did, others would follow, and the institution’s interests would be undermined. It appears that they considered it necessary, in deference to those interests, to set aside the demands of natural justice. Saint Stephen said, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ (7.60)

When Stephen said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God’ (7.56), it was interpreted as blasphemy, and they began

stoning him. He prayed for them, saying, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ (7.60) *Acts* concludes the account by saying that Saul of Tarsus – later Saint Paul – ‘entirely approved of the killing.’ (8.1)

The outcome of Stephen’s death was to accelerate the split between Jews and Christians, between synagogue and church. It helped bring about the downfall of the institutions it was meant to protect, a powerful witness to the self-defeating folly, (as well as immorality), of a religious institution choosing expediency above right and wrong.

## **SAINT JOHN the EVANGELIST: 27 December**

John was a son of Zebedee and Salome, and brother of James the Greater. In the gospels the two brothers are often called 'the sons of Zebedee' and they received from Jesus the nick-name of "Sons of Thunder" for their fiery temperament. (Mark 3.17) They were fishermen with their father on Lake Gennesareth. They probably became for a time disciples of John the Baptist, and, with Peter and Andrew, were called by Jesus to become his disciples. (John 1.35-42) They returned with Jesus from the Jordan to Galilee, and remained with him for some time. (John 2.12, 22; 4.2, 8, 27 ff.) But later, John and his companions went back to fishing until they were called by Jesus to definitive discipleship. (Matthew 4.18-22; Mark 1.16-20)

From James' name being placed first in some lists of apostles, the conclusion has been drawn that John was the younger of the two brothers. Whatever about that, he had a prominent position among the apostles. Peter, James and he were the only witnesses of the raising to life of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5.37), of the transfiguration (Matthew 17.1), and of the agony in Gethsemane. (Matthew 26.37) Only he and Peter were sent into Jerusalem to make the preparations for the Last Supper. (Luke 22.8) At the supper itself his place was next to Jesus, on whom he leaned. (John 13.23, 25) According to the usual interpretation, he was also that 'other disciple' who, with Peter, followed Jesus after his arrest into the house of the high-priest. (John 18.15) John alone

among the apostles remained near Jesus on Calvary, with the mother of Jesus and the holy women, and took Mary into his care. (John 19.25-27) After the resurrection, John, with Peter, was the first of the disciples to reach the tomb, and he was the first to believe that Jesus had risen. (John 20.2-10)

When Christ appeared at the Lake of Gennesareth, John was also the first of the disciples present to recognize him, saying simply, 'It is the Lord.' (John 21.7) John shows how close his relationship to Jesus was by the title he uses of himself: 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' (John 13.23; 20.2 and 21.7)

After Christ's ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit, John, with Peter, took a prominent part in founding and guiding the church. We see him in the company of Peter at the healing of the lame man in the Temple (Acts 3.1 ff.) He was imprisoned with Peter. (Acts 4.3) We find him with Peter visiting new converts in Samaria. (Acts 8.14) And, with James and Cephas, he was present in Jerusalem when Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to preach to the Gentiles, commending them 'to remember to help the poor.' (Galatians 2.9-10)

John was the author of the fourth gospel, and has been regarded as the author of the three letters of John and the book of Revelation (Apocalypse), written by a John of Patmos. But a fourth century council in Rome decreed that the author of 1 John and that of 2 and 3 John should be regarded as distinct individuals. These matters have been debated since about 200 AD. The most widely



accepted view is that, whether or not the same man wrote all the Johannine literature, it came out of one Christian community in Asia Minor.

The Coptic *Synaxarium* states that John the Evangelist lived to be over ninety. It also states that, in his old age, he gave only very short sermons, saying, 'Love one another.' Eventually, his hearers became so tired of hearing it that they asked him why he kept repeating it. He answered, 'Because it is the Lord's command, and, if we do it, it is sufficient.' (From Saint Jerome's *Commentary on Galatians* 3.6)

It is said that, alone among the apostles, John did not suffer martyrdom but died of old age and was buried in Ephesus, in modern Turkey. However, a tradition that he lived and died in Patmos in Greece was held by most Christians by the late second century.

## THE HOLY INNOCENTS: 28 December

The Christmas scene in the public mind is overlaid with images that come from sources other than the Gospel. For instance, in cribs we see figures of sheep, an ox and an ass. They are not mentioned in the gospel – though they are perhaps borrowed from Isaiah 11.1-9. The account of the massacre of the Holy Innocents in Matthew 2 doesn't say about the wise men that they were kings, *pace* the carol, 'We three kings of Orient are...', nor that there were three of them, nor that their names were Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, nor a fourth Artaban, nor that they came from Persia; those are additions that crept into the story along the way, via Marco Polo's *Travels*. For a long time, too, they were called *Magi*, (as in Simon Magus - plural *Magi* - of Acts 8.9-24), a word which led to the English words *magic* and *magician*, which have quite a different connotation from *wise*. And myrrh and incense were used in charms. They were astrologers; they followed stars. In a highly imaginative piece of exegesis, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux wrote of the three gifts brought by them that the gold was to pay the expenses of the flight into Egypt, the incense was to negate the smell of the ox, the ass and the sheep, and the myrrh was to clear Jesus' intestinal worms! The *Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* says of Matthew 2.1-18 that, 'around the core of fact is a good deal of inspired embroidery, whose message is not be learnt by feverish insistence on [the] historicity of every detail.' (Nelson, London, 1953, 713d)

The King Herod of this story was called the Great, perhaps because he was a great builder: he built a large port on the sea-coast at Caesarea and also the temple in Jerusalem. One may sometimes see on TV pictures of its Western wall, also called the Wailing Wall, because of Jews praying before it. Herod blinded, then killed his mother-in-law, and murdered an uncle, a brother-in-law, a wife and three of his sons. This led Emperor Augustus to pun in Greek that you would be safer to be his pig (*hus*) than his son (*huios*). As a Jew, Herod would not kill a pig; as a king, he killed his sons. Jews say that although there is no record in Jewish tradition of this massacre, Herod would have been well capable of it. They say also that he was as Jewish as he considered it politically necessary to be in order to maintain his position as King of the Jews. Half Idumaeon and half Samaritan, he probably did not really believe or care.

In looking at the Gospel story, we have to ask how wise were the “wise” men from the East to pay a courtesy call on King Herod and tell him their story. They came to Jerusalem and let it be known around the city that they were looking for ‘the infant king of the Jews.’ (2.2) The Gospel says that, ‘When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem.’ (2.3) How did they expect him to react? They had announced they were looking for his replacement. Did they expect him to roll out the red carpet and say ‘Céad míle fáilte’? How would any king of the time have reacted, let alone one of Herod’s murderous propensities? How wise was it to take at face value his statement that, ‘When you have found him, let

me know, so that I, too, may come and do him homage'? (2.8) Who would have believed that? And yet it took a special message from God to dissuade them from doing so. (Matthew 2.12) The result – predictably, in view of Herod's record – was a massacre, with all boys in the region of Bethlehem 'of two years old and under' being killed. (Matthew 2.16) If he hadn't hesitated to kill his own sons it would hardly have troubled him to kill other people's. One can't help asking: could the "wise" men not just have kept their mouths shut? 'If a fool can hold his tongue, even he can pass for wise, and pass for clever if he keeps his lips tight shut.' (Proverbs 17.28)

Is the passage a send-up of the "wise," especially in contrast to the shepherds, people of no education and even less status, who said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us'? And, having done that, 'The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.' (Luke 2.15, 20) They went, they saw, they glorified, they praised – and left no dead bodies after them. *That* was wise. The story expresses a theme common to the Gospels and which Jesus expressed in Matthew, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.' (11.25-26) And also, 'God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.' (1 Corinthians 1.23-25)

The passage (Matthew 2.1-12) concludes by saying that the wise men ‘returned to their own country by a different way.’ They had come by way of astrology, they followed a star; that’s what astrologers do. They went back ‘by a different way.’ Is that a hint that it was not by way of astrology that the “wise men” returned, but that, having met Jesus, their lives were changed? The book of Acts refers repeatedly to the Christian life as *The Way*. Among other things, is this passage saying, ‘Don’t look for God in the stars; he has come down to earth. Leave astrology and horoscopes behind you; Jesus is “the Way, the Truth and the Life.”’ (John 14.6) The stars – celestial or celebrity - will not lead you home.’

The American Catholic social activist, Dorothy Day, had a good word to say for the wise men: ‘The wise men’s... journey across half the world made up for those who refuse to stir one hand’s breadth from the routine of their lives to go to Christ.’ (From “Room for Christ”) If we take the story of the journey of the wise men as *midrash*, a traditional Jewish form of didactically motivated re-interpretation, then perhaps its best meaning may be that ‘pagans now share the same inheritance, they are parts of the same body, and the same promise has been made to them, in Christ Jesus, through the gospel.’ (Ephesians 3.5-6)

## **The Companions of Christ**

Saint Stephen (December 26<sup>th</sup>) was willing to die, and was executed.

Saint John (27<sup>th</sup>) was willing to die, but was not executed.

The Holy Innocents (28<sup>th</sup>) were not willing to die, but were executed.

In the Middle Ages, these saints were collectively called the *Comites Christi*, the Companions of Christ.

This post-Christmas liturgical blood-bath is a reminder that commitment - of any kind or to anyone or anything - carries a cost.

## SAINT THOMAS BECKET: 29 December

Thomas Becket was born about 1118, on 21 December, in London, to Gilbert and Matilda Becket, who were of Norman origin. He has at times been called *à* Becket: *à* means *from*, as in Thomas *à* Kempis, the author of the well-known *Imitation of Christ*, who was from a town in the Netherlands called Kempis. But this Thomas' name was simply Becket. The *à* was added later, perhaps for some perceived snob value.

When he was ten, he was sent to Merton Priory and later to a grammar school. Sometime after this, his father suffered financial reverses, and Thomas was forced to earn a living as a clerk. He acquired a position with Theobald of Bec, the archbishop of Canterbury.

The archbishop entrusted him with several missions to Rome, and also sent him to Bologna and Auxerre to study canon law. Theobald named Thomas Archdeacon of Canterbury, and to other church offices. His success led to Theobald recommending him to King Henry II for the vacant post of Lord Chancellor; he was appointed in 1155.

As chancellor, Thomas enforced the king's traditional sources of revenue exacted from all landowners, including churches and bishoprics. King Henry even sent his son Henry to live in Thomas' household, it being the custom then for noble children to be fostered out to other noble houses. The younger Henry is reported to have

later said that he received more fatherly love in a day from Thomas than in a lifetime from his own father.

Several months after the death of Theobald, Thomas was nominated in 1162 as Archbishop of Canterbury. His election was confirmed by a council of bishops and noblemen. He was ordained priest on 2 June 1162, and ordained archbishop of Canterbury the next day. The transformation of Thomas into an ascetic through grace and repentance occurred at this time.

Henry may have expected that Thomas would continue to put the royal government first rather than the church. Indeed, that was probably why he was given the job in the first place. A rift grew between them as Thomas resigned the chancellorship and sought to recover and extend the rights of the archbishopric. This led to a series of conflicts with the king, including one about the jurisdiction of secular courts over criminal English clergy that accelerated antipathy between them. Attempts by Henry to influence other bishops against Thomas began in Westminster in 1163, when the king sought approval of the traditional rights of royal government in regard to the church. Thomas was officially asked to approve of the king's claimed rights, or face political repercussions.

Henry sought less clerical independence and a weaker connection with Rome. In 1164, he secured the support of all the bishops except Thomas. Finally, however, even Thomas agreed to the substance of Henry's position, as set out in the Constitutions of Clarendon, but still refused



to formally sign the documents. Henry summoned him on charges of contempt of royal authority and corruption in the chancellor's office. Convicted, Thomas stormed out of the trial and fled to France.

Henry pursued him with a series of edicts, aimed at his friends and supporters as well as Thomas himself. But King Louis VII of France offered Thomas protection in a Cistercian abbey, until Henry's threats against the Order obliged him to return. Thomas fought back by threatening excommunication and interdict against the king, the kingdom and the bishops. Pope Alexander III, though sympathising with Thomas in theory, favoured a diplomatic approach, and papal legates were sent in 1167 as arbitrators. In 1170, Alexander sent delegates to impose a solution. At that point, Henry offered a compromise that allowed Thomas to return home.

In June 1170, the archbishop of York, with the bishops of London and Salisbury, crowned Henry king at York. This was a breach of Canterbury's privilege of coronation, so Thomas excommunicated all three. While they fled to Henry in Normandy, Thomas continued to excommunicate his opponents in the church.

Upon hearing reports of Thomas' actions, Henry is said to have uttered words that were interpreted by his men as wishing Thomas killed. His exact words are in doubt, and several versions have been reported. The most commonly quoted one is, 'Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?' Another version is, 'What miserable drones and traitors have I nourished and brought up in

my household, who let their lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born cleric?’ Other variations have found their way into popular tradition, lending credence to the notion that Henry chose his words carefully with creative ambiguity, so that, while his wish for Thomas’ death would be carried out, he could disown responsibility, saying he had been misunderstood.

Whatever Henry said, it was interpreted as a command, and four knights set out for Canterbury cathedral on 29 December 1170. They ordered Thomas to go to Winchester to give an account of his actions, but he refused. They then struck him on the head several times with their swords and he died on the spot. Remarkably, a cleric who had accompanied the knights put his foot on Thomas’ neck and scattered his brain matter and blood on the pavement, saying, ‘Let us away, knights; this fellow will rise no more.’

Soon after, people throughout Europe began venerating Thomas as a martyr. A little over two years after his death, he was canonised by Pope Alexander III. Local legends regarding Thomas arose; a common feature is their presentation of him as gruff and angry. On 12 July 1174, in the midst of a popular revolt, Henry did public penance at Thomas’ tomb, which quickly became a widely visited place of pilgrimage. The pope excommunicated the four knights. They travelled to Rome to ask for forgiveness, and were ordered by the pope to serve as knights in the Holy Land for fourteen years. (Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* is a story

about pilgrims on their way there, and T. S. Eliot's play *Murder in the Cathedral* enacts the story.) Thomas' tomb was destroyed by Henry VIII in 1538.

From Henry's point of view, the issues at stake were that clergy were exempt from the jurisdiction of royal courts; instead they were tried in church courts. Henry wanted more control over the church and to diminish its role, and that of the papacy. The bishops could point out that, under the anarchic and lawless conditions prevailing in England during the reign of Henry's predecessor, Stephen, the church's rule filled a void. They also pointed out that, under royal law, a person could be punished twice for the same offence, and that punishments were too severe, with flogging, sexual mutilation and the death penalty applied frequently. Church courts did not use them. Furthermore, the bishops did not wish to see more royal power over the church as this usually meant the appointment of royal favourites as bishops, and to claims on church property and revenue for use in war, among other things. They saw it as wrong that what the faithful had contributed freely, and had been carefully built up over generations of effort, should be used to kill fellow-Christians.

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**Follow-up notes**

In 1172, the Irish saint, Archbishop Laurence O'Toole of Dublin, while on a visit to Canterbury to negotiate the Treaty of Windsor with Henry II on behalf of the High King, Ruairi O'Connor, was attacked while saying Mass

in the cathedral. His attacker was a deranged man who, it seems, having heard of Laurence's reputation for holiness, had the idea of giving the church another martyr, and so clubbed him on the head. Laurence, although knocked to the floor, was able to recover and finish the Mass.

After the Reformation, when much of Europe became Lutheran, and Henry VIII became head of the church in England, the church became, in effect, a department of state, losing much of its freedom. It also lost the ability to be a counter-balance to royal power, and much of its property. One result was the rise of absolute monarchies and, with that, increased international warfare on sea and land, as kings now had greater wealth at their disposal.

## **POPE SAINT SYLVESTER I: 31 December**

Sylvester served as bishop of Rome from 31 January 314 to 31 December 335. Although he filled the see at an important era in the history of the church, little is known of him. It is said that he was the son of a Roman named Rufinus. The accounts of his papacy as preserved in the *Liber Pontificalis* of the seventh or eighth century contain little more than a record of gifts said to have been conferred on the church by Emperor Constantine I.

In 313, just a few months before Sylvester took up office, Emperor Constantine published the Edict of Milan, which decreed,

To each person's judgment and will the right should be given to care for sacred things according to their own free choice.... To no one whatever should we deny liberty to follow either the religion of the Christians or any other cult which of their own free choice they have thought to be best adapted for themselves.

This new freedom led, among other things, to the building of churches. During Sylvester's pontificate were built the churches founded at Rome by Constantine, for instance, the basilicas of Saint John Lateran and Saint Peter, and several churches over the graves of martyrs.

Sylvester did not attend the first Council of Nicaea in 325, but was represented by two legates and approved the council's decisions.

*A Life of Saint Sylvester*, published at the start of the sixth century, and included in the *Donation of Constantine*, is an entertaining forgery. Among other stories, it has Sylvester killing a dragon, and he is often depicted with the dying beast. Its historicity is on a par with Dan Brown's writings. But was Arianism the dragon Sylvester slew? Maybe.

The *Donation* was fabricated when Sylvester had been dead for over four hundred years, and purports to be a record by the emperor himself of his conversion, the profession of his new faith, and the privileges he conferred on Sylvester, his clergy, and their successors. According to it, Constantine offered Sylvester the imperial crown, but he refused it. Then Constantine decided to take a second wife, and asked Sylvester's approval. But, being a holy man, he refused. Constantine threatened him, and Sylvester, rather than give in, escaped to the woods. Not long after, Constantine fell ill with leprosy. Despairing of ever regaining his health, he had a dream directing him to send for Sylvester. He complied, and Sylvester received his posse in his cave and baptized them. They then led him back to Constantine, whom he healed and baptized. (To add to the spin, Constantine and his posse were Jews!) The emperor, abjectly grateful, not only confirmed the bishop of Rome as primate above all other bishops, but resigned his imperial insignia and walked before Sylvester's

horse, holding its bridle like a groom. The generous pope, in return, and of his good will, returned the crown to Constantine, who abandoned Rome to the pope and took up residence in Constantinople.

The *Donation* was treated as genuine by those who found it expedient to do so; it was widely used when useful, although for centuries known to have been a forgery. Some of the evidence for its inauthenticity was that it employed a Latin style and legal terms not developed for several centuries after Constantine. It also used the term *satraps* of the emperor's officials, a Persian term unknown in Roman documents. Probably at least a first draft of it was made shortly after the middle of the eighth century in order to assist Pope Stephen II in negotiations with the Frankish Mayor of the Palace, Pepin the Short.

Pope Leo IX, 'in a letter of 1054 to Michael Caerularius, Patriarch of Constantinople,... cites the *Donatio* to show that the Holy See possessed both an earthly and a heavenly *imperium*, the royal priesthood.' (From *The Catholic Encyclopedia*) The "grant" of sovereignty over Ireland to King Henry II in 1155 by Pope Adrian IV in the bull *Laudabiliter* was done under the terms of the *Donation*, on the pretext that Henry would reform the Irish church. Adrian - Nicholas Breakspear - was an Englishman. 'The authenticity of this Bull,.. though long disputed, is now generally accepted.' (*Oxford Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church*, entry "Hadrian IV.") This "grant" was confirmed by Pope Alexander III in 1172.

The background to the *Donation* is one of a constant struggle by the church to free itself from interference by political leaders in its affairs, especially in the appointment of bishops, a struggle which continues to this day, for example, in China. But it goes much further. Behind the spin was the later development of claims to papal supremacy over rulers, including the emperor, who owes his crown to the pope, and may therefore be deposed by papal decree. Pope Adrian IV claimed to have this authority from the *Donation* in his dispute with Emperor Frederick I (Barbarossa), of Germany. (See Norman F. Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, 1993) Under Pope Innocent III, the pendulum had swung the way of papal supremacy. It was said of him that, when he stamped his foot, crowns rattled all over Europe! It was said by him that, ‘As the moon receives its light from the sun, and is inferior to the sun, so do kings receive all their glory and dignity from the Holy See,’ and, ‘God has set the Prince of Apostles over kings and kingdoms, with a mission tear up, plant, destroy, scatter and rebuild.’ (Hutton Webster, *Early European History*, Part II, p.461)

In recent times, a better balance was found by Pope Paul VI. Speaking to political rulers at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council on 9 December 1965, he said, ‘What does the Church ask of you today?.... she asks of you nothing but freedom, the freedom to believe and to preach her faith, the freedom to love God and to serve him, the freedom to live and to bring people its message of life.’ (*The Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Walter M. Abbott, Chapman, London, 1966, p.693.



n.53) It cannot ask for less than that; it does not ask for more than that.

**The Donation of Constantine** (an abbreviated version):-

At a time when a mighty and filthy leprosy had invaded all the flesh of my [Emperor Constantine I] body, and care was administered by many physicians who came together - but by none of them did I achieve health - there came here also the [pagan] priests of the Capitol, saying to me that a font should be made on the Capitol, and that I should fill it with the blood of innocent infants; and that, if I bathed in it while it was warm, I might be cleansed. And very many innocent infants having been brought together according to their words, when the sacrilegious priests of the pagans wished them to be slaughtered and the font to be filled with their blood, Our Serenity, perceiving the tears of the mothers, straightway abhorred the deed. And, pitying them, I ordered their sons to be restored to them; and, giving them vehicles and gifts, sent them off rejoicing to their own.

The apostles Saints Peter and Paul appeared to me, saying, 'Sylvester, when you shall have led him to yourself, will himself show you a pool of piety; in which, when he shall have dipped you for the third time, all that strength of the leprosy will desert you. And, when this shall have been done, make this return to your Saviour, that by your order through the whole world the churches may be restored.'

Sylvester imposed upon us a time of penance that I might obtain pardon from our Lord God for all the things that had been impiously done and unjustly ordered by me.... The font having been blessed, the wave of salvation purified me there with a triple immersion. For there, I, being placed at the bottom of the font, saw with my own eyes a hand from heaven touching me; whence rising, clean, know that I was cleansed from all the squalor of leprosy.

I considered it advisable that Peter [the pope] should obtain from us and our empire the power of a supremacy greater than the earthly clemency of our imperial serenity is seen to have had conceded to it... To the extent of our earthly imperial power, we decree that his holy Roman church shall be honoured with veneration, and that, more than our empire and earthly throne, the most sacred seat of Saint Peter shall be gloriously exalted, we giving to it the imperial power, and the dignity of glory, vigour, and honour.

And we ordain and decree that he shall have the supremacy as well over the four chief seats Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Jerusalem, as also over all the churches of God in the whole world. And he who for the time being shall be pontiff of that holy Roman church shall be more exalted than, and chief over, all the priests of the whole world; and, according to his judgment, everything which is to be provided for the service of God or the stability of the faith of the Christians is to be administered.

On these churches, for the endowing of divine services, we have conferred estates, and have enriched them with different objects; and, through our sacred imperial decrees, we have granted them our gift of land in the East as well as in the West; and even on the northern and southern coast — namely in Judea, Greece, Asia, Thrace, Africa and Italy and the various islands: under this condition indeed, that all shall be administered by the hand of our most blessed father the pontiff Sylvester and his successors.

To Saint Sylvester, our father, the chief pontiff and universal pope of the city of Rome, and to all the pontiffs his successors, who until the end of the world shall be about to sit in the seat of Saint Peter, we concede and, by this present, do confer our imperial Lateran palace, which is preferred to, and ranks above, all the palaces in the whole world; then a diadem, that is, the crown of our head, and at the same time the tiara; and, also, the shoulder band, that is, the collar that usually surrounds our imperial neck; and also the purple mantle, and crimson tunic, and all the imperial raiment; and the same rank as those presiding over the imperial cavalry; conferring also the imperial scepters, and, at the same time, the spears and standards; also the banners and different imperial ornaments, and all the advantage of our high imperial position, and the glory of our power.

And we decree, as to those most reverend men, the clergy who serve, in different orders, that same holy Roman church, that they shall have the same advantage, distinction, power and excellence by the glory of which

our most illustrious senate is adorned; that is, that they shall be made patricians and consuls, we commanding that they shall also be decorated with the other imperial dignities.

We also decreed this, that this same venerable one, our father Sylvester, the supreme pontiff, and all the pontiffs his successors, might use and bear upon their heads... the diadem; that is, the crown which we have granted him from our own head, of purest gold and precious gems. But he, the most holy pope, did not at all allow that crown of gold to be used over the clerical crown which he wears to the glory of Saint Peter, but we placed upon his most holy head, with our own hands, a tiara of gleaming splendour representing the glorious resurrection of our Lord. [Popes were formally inaugurated in office in a ceremony of coronation with a triple tiara; the last such was of Paul VI in 1963.] And, holding the bridle of his horse out of reverence for Saint Peter we performed for him the duty of groom.

In order that for that cause the supreme pontificate may not deteriorate, but may rather be adorned with power and glory even more than is the dignity of an earthly rule: behold, we, giving over to the oft-mentioned most blessed pontiff, our father Sylvester the universal pope, as well our palace, as has been said, as also the city of Rome and all the provinces, districts and cities of Italy or of the western regions; and relinquishing them, by our inviolable gift, to the power and sway of himself or the pontiffs his successors, do decree, by this our godlike charter and imperial constitution, that it shall be so

arranged, and do concede that they (the palaces, provinces etc.) shall lawfully remain with the holy Roman church.

Wherefore we have perceived it to be fitting that our empire and the power of our kingdom should be transferred and changed to the regions of the East; and that, in the province of Byzantium, in a most fitting place, a city should be built in our name; and that our empire should there be established. For, where the supremacy of priests and the head of the Christian religion has been established by a heavenly ruler, it is not just that there an earthly ruler should have jurisdiction.

We decree, moreover, that all these things which, through this our imperial charter and through other godlike commands, we have established and confirmed, shall remain uninjured and unshaken until the end of the world. If anyone, moreover - which we do not believe - prove a scorner or despiser in this matter, he shall be subject and bound over to eternal damnation. And, being burned in the nethermost hell, he shall perish with the devil and all the impious.

The page, moreover, of this our imperial decree, we, confirming it with our own hands, did place above the venerable body of Saint Peter, chief of the apostles; and there,... we did hand it over, to be enduringly and happily possessed, to our most blessed father Sylvester the supreme pontiff and universal pope, and, through him, to all the pontiffs his successors.

## **SUPPLEMENT OF IRISH SAINTS NOT INCLUDED IN THE GENERAL CALENDAR**

- 2 February: Saint Brigid.
- 5 May: Blessed Edmund Rice.
- 6 June: Saint Jarlath.
- 9 June: Saint Colm Cille.
- 20 June: The Martyrs of Ireland.
- 1 July: Saint Oliver Plunkett.
- 3 November: Saint Malachy.
- 6 November: All the Saints of Ireland.
- 14 November: Saint Laurence O'Toole.

‘The saints in each generation, joined to those who have gone before and filled, like them, with light, become a golden chain, in which each saint is a separate link, united to the next by faith and works and love. So in the one God they form a single chain which cannot easily be broken.’ (Saint Symeon the New Theologian)

## SAINT BRIGID: 1 February

Brigid was born in Faughart, Co. Louth, Ireland, about 439. She consecrated her life to God in religious vows, receiving the veil and spiritual formation, probably from Saint Mel, and, for a period, stayed under his direction in Ardagh. Hospitality, care of the poor, the sick and the needy were the principal forms of her service. Some of her associates went to the European mainland on missionary work. She founded a monastery at Kildare (Irish *Cill Dara*, the church of the oak), became its abbess, and took an active part with a Bishop Conleth in spreading the gospel. They had the first joint monastery of men and women in Ireland. For centuries, Kildare was ruled by a double line of abbot-bishops and of abbesses, the Abbess of Kildare being regarded as the first among monastic leaders in Ireland. To her is attributed the saying that, 'Anyone without an *anam-chara* (soul-friend) is like a body without a head.'

There is a legend of how she went to a (very) petty chieftain to ask for a grant of land on which to build a monastery. He made a great show before his officials of agreeing to give it to her - as much as her cloak would cover. She spread it on the ground, where, of course, it covered only a tiny area. But she prayed to God for help, and, to the chief's dismay, the cloak spread and spread, covering a large part of his territory. He couldn't break his promise without losing face. He asked her to explain what had happened, and this led him to faith in Christ.

He then willingly agreed that she should have sufficient land for her houses.

She died in Kildare about 525, at the age, it is said, of eighty-six, leaving a cathedral city and a school that became famous all over Europe. She was widely venerated on the Continent as well as in Ireland. She is venerated, too, by the Eastern Orthodox as one of the great Western saints before the schism of 1054. Along with Saint Colmcille, she is secondary patron of Ireland, Patrick being the first. About the year 878, owing to Scandinavian raids, her relics were taken to Downpatrick, where they were interred in the tomb of Patrick and Columba. They were discovered in 1185, and on June 9 of the following year were reinterred in Down Cathedral. In the *Book of Lismore*, a book on the lives of the ancient Celtic Irish saints written in Irish, Brigid is described as, 'the prophetess of Christ, the Queen of the South, and the Mary of the Gael.'

In 1085, Gerald of Wales (Geraldus Cambrensis), a chronicler in the retinue of the Norman Prince John, came to Ireland and visited Brigid's foundation in Kildare. He wrote, 'Great is victorious Brigid and lovely her thronged sanctuary.' He referred also to the illuminated manuscripts he saw there.

In recent times, the Brigidine sisters were founded in Ireland in 1807 by Bishop Delaney. They have houses in Dublin, Galway, and Kildare and Leighlin; their headquarters is now in Australia. There is also a girl guides' organization known as the Brígíns, the little



Brigids, and a spirituality centre in Kildare bears her name. Kildare county GAA teams are called the Lily Whites because of their all white kit; this has its origin in the lily traditionally associated with Brigid. The Saint Brigid's cross, made of reeds, is perhaps her best-known symbol in the contemporary church. Her birth-place in Faughart is a popular place of pilgrimage. Brigid's cult was officially approved by the church in 1988.

Brigid was adopted as an icon by twentieth century feminists who admire her achievements in a patriarchal society. Within the church, many hailed her achievement, and that of her successor abbesses, in holding a position superior to their male counterparts. The claim, consistent in her *Lives*, that she had the status of a bishop, a status afterwards accorded to successive abbesses of Kildare until the twelfth century, was a source of inspiration despite being downplayed, sometimes for misogynistic reasons. For a time, Kildare rather than Armagh was considered for the primatial see of Ireland.

According to some recent revisionist scholarship, Brigid never existed, but was created by the Christian imagination as a way of "baptizing" the fertility festival of Imbolc, the pagan goddess of spring. (Bealtaine, Lúnasa and Samhain, respectively May, August and November, are the other three.) Her feast, 1 February, is the first day of spring, half-way between the winter solstice and the spring equinox.

She is regarded by some as a composite saint. These are characters, real or fictional, whose life is composed of elements - stories, events, teachings, miracles, etc. - drawn from different people and places, and woven into a coherent story in the name of one person. Examples of people believed to be composite saints include George (the dragon-slayer), Catherine of Alexandria, and perhaps Juan Diego of Guadalupe.

*Lives*, such as those of Brigid, are traditional in form, and draw references from the Old and New Testaments, the *Apocrypha* and the early Church Fathers. They are sparse in specific biographical detail, and have been described as ‘primarily concerned with Brigid’s way of life rather than her life as such, and focused on her saintliness and the miracles that testified to it.’ Saint Brigid stands on the boundary between pagan mythology, Druidism and Christian spirituality, and is the most prominent female leader of the early Celtic Christian Church. Éamon Duffy, Professor of History at Cambridge, wrote,

A staggering number of the figures who have evoked the most passionate veneration and the most elaborate and popular of cults have in fact been entirely fictitious, or at least no more than a name round which legend congealed. (Michael Higgins, “A saint in the making,” *The Irish Catholic*, 9 February 2012, p.21)

This may, or may not, be true of Brigid.

There are many holy Brigids in Irish tradition as there are many holy Colmans. However, in the controversies about this in the last third of the twentieth century, it was noted that eleven people with whom Brigid is associated in her *Lives* are independently attested in annalistic sources.

Brigid, also known as Bride in English, is associated with holy wells in many places, some of them called Bridewell. It is said, also that, in medieval times, as part of the culture of chivalry, knights idealized their future wives by calling them their Bride.

## **BLESSED EDMUND RICE: 5 May**

Edmund Rice was born near Callan, Co. Kilkenny, Ireland, on 1 June 1762. He had seven brothers and two step-sisters. The family was prosperous, and Edmund received a good education. As a young man in nearby Waterford city he did well. He had a good business, and was well respected in his own circle. Marrying at the age of twenty-five he had his own house, and soon a child was on the way.

Around him, perhaps unnoticed by him, was great poverty and injustice, which some people saw as the natural order of things, the way things had always been and would always be. Some went further and saw it as the way God wanted things to be. After all, they argued, had Jesus not said that the poor we would always have with us? So there. The hymn writer Cecil Frances Alexander captured that sentiment when she wrote,

‘The rich man in his castle,  
the poor man at his gate,  
God made them, high or lowly,  
and ordered their estate.’

But all things were not so bright and beautiful, wise and wonderful, in Waterford in the late eighteenth century. There were many, within the church as well as in general society, who thought it wrong, dangerous or even mad, to think of educating the poor: it would give them ideas above their station. Heads nodded wisely that

no good would come of that. They pointed to the French Revolution – Edmund was twenty-seven when it happened - as an example of what might result when the poor “got beyond themselves”, so they urged what they might have chosen to call “prudence.” Better to leave the poor ignorant; they are more manageable that way, and it is all for their good, because their betters have their interests at heart. That was the political correctness of the day. Edmund – and his contemporary, Nano Nagle, foundress of the Presentation Sisters - challenged it.

Might Edmund have gone along with such ideas, might he even have shared them, had not the experience of personal suffering jolted him? It entered his life in a big way: his wife died as a result of a fall from a horse; their baby girl, born prematurely, was retarded, and needed care all her life. Suddenly, things must have become very different. Was this a conversion experience for him, a jolt that opens the eyes to see things from a different perspective, like Saint Ignatius recovering from war wounds or in his experience on the river-bank, or Saint Francis of Assisi meeting the leper?

Whatever the reason, Edmund did change. He became a committed servant of the poor, seeing education as the way forward. He set up his first school in Waterford in 1802, saying, ‘Trusting in God’s help, I hope to be able to educate... boys to be good Catholics and good citizens.’ But there were problems: one was that he was not a teacher; his background was in business.

He was totally unprepared for his new role. However, he soon got the assistance of two teachers who had experience and training.... Although he found it very difficult to cope, with the help of the paid teachers his first school soon became established. It was not long, however, before his two teachers decided that the work was too difficult... and no matter how much money they were offered they would not stay.... Being a man of deep faith and unbounded trust in Almighty God he kept going somehow and was soon rewarded with two young men, Patrick Finn and Thomas Grosvenor, who came to help him, not as paid assistants but as helpers. (S. T. Ó Duinn, *Br. Edmund Ignatius Rice.*)

Edmund drew inspiration from the rule of Saint John Baptist de la Salle and his Brothers of the Christian Schools; he adapted it and won approval for his project from Popes Pius VI and VII.

Suffering never left him. And perhaps the greatest was from within, from those who should have supported him:

Edmund's final years were blighted by... dissensions that arose under his successor... In 1841, he suffered the indignity of being turned away from the door of a chapter of the Brothers he had founded. He became an invalid, confined to his room. He, who had helped so many during his long life, needed full-time nursing, and had few lucid intervals. (Donal Blake, *A Man for our Time.*)

Having led his congregations from 1821 to 1838, with the religious name of Ignatius, he died in Waterford on 29 August 1844, aged eighty-two. He was beatified in 1996.

Edmund was not alone among founders in experiencing rejection by his closest associates. Saint Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorists, was expelled from his congregation by his brothers. In a similar way, Saint Francis of Assisi was elbowed aside from the leadership of the Friars Minor by Brother Elias. Towards the end of his life he became blind, developed tuberculosis, was rejected by many of his brothers, and lived in a hut infested with mice. It was while he was there that he wrote the beautiful Canticum of the Sun. He brought something beautiful out of suffering.

(The black slaves of the southern states of the United States were treated unjustly and cruelly, but they gave the world the Negro spiritual, a type of song which has uplifted people everywhere. They exemplified what the Sufi mystic, Jalal Al-Din Rumi said, 'The wound is the place where the light enters you.' Has California with all its wealth produced anything comparable?)

Renaissance Italy was torn apart by constant warfare. But it gave the world splendid architecture, sculpture, art, music and literature. Switzerland, at the same time, was a haven of peace, calm, and tranquillity - and it gave the world the cuckoo clock. Would we have missed it?

Saint John of the Cross wrote some of his most beautiful poetry while held by his fellow Carmelites in a prison where they scraped the tonsure off his head with a sea shell.)

Out of Edmund's suffering grew great good that continues today around the world. He said, 'Were we to know the merit of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour for the love of God, we should prize it more than gold or silver.' He also said, 'Let us do ever so little for God, we may be sure he will never forget it, nor let it pass unheeded,' and, 'One thing you may be sure of is that, while you work for God, whether you succeed or not, he will amply reward you.'

By the time of his death the two congregations deriving from him, that is, the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers, had about 100 houses with 300 schools in Ireland, teaching some 30,000 pupils. There were branches of the congregations in Australia, Canada, India and Gibraltar. After his death, his congregations continued to grow and became world-wide bodies.



## SAINT JARLATH: 6 June

Jarlath (Iarlaithe) was born in Connaught about 445. He studied first under Saint Benignus, a disciple of Saint Patrick, and became a priest. Then, about 495, he went to the Aran Islands to study under Saint Enda. He went on to found a college at Cloonfush, near Tuam, which attracted scholars from all over Ireland. Its fame was attested by two of its pupils, Saints Brendan of Ardfert and Colman of Cloyne. Jarlath became bishop, with his see at Tuam.

He appears as a prominent figure in the *Irish Lives* by Saint Brendan of Clonfert. He was known for his generosity and devotion to prayer. The *Féilire (Calendar)* of Aengus tells us that he was noted for fasting, vigils, and penance. One of the records of the Orthodox Church (the *Great Synaxaristes*) records that, as a result of his asceticism and devotion to prayer, he received the gift of prophecy.

Jarlath is patron saint of the diocese of Tuam. The diocese achieved the status of principal see of Connacht in 1152 at the Synod of Kells-Mellifont.

Jarlath's feast day is 6 June, the date of the transfer of his relics to a church built in his honour next to the cathedral in Tuam. They were encased in a silver shrine, from which the 13th-century church gained the name Teampall na Scrín, the 'church of the shrine.' Jarlath died on 26 December, about 540, aged about ninety.

## **SAINT COLM CILLE (Columba): 9 June**

Colm Cille, also called Columba, (not to be confused with Columbanus; see 23 November), was born at Gartan, County Donegal, Ireland, on 7 December 521, the son of Feidhlim and Eithne. Feidhlim was a chief related to several of the princes then reigning in Ireland and the west of Scotland. His parents had him baptised and gave him the name Criomhthann (meaning *Fox*). When he was old enough he went to Moville to begin his studies. As he spent most of his free time there in the church praying in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, his fellow students gave him the name Colm Cille (*Dove of the Church*; in Latin, *Columba*).

To complete his studies for ordination, he went to Saint Mobhi at Glasnevin, near Dublin, and, in 544, to Clonard in County Meath where Saint Finian impressed upon students the need for missionaries. There, Colm Cille made friends with many men who were later to become great missionaries; they came to be called the Twelve Apostles of Ireland. In 546, he was ordained priest. Later that year, he founded his first monastery in Derry (in Irish, *Doire Cholm Cille*). He spent the next seventeen years travelling throughout Ireland preaching and teaching. He founded thirty-seven churches and monasteries in Kells, Swords, Drumcliff, Durrow and elsewhere.

Colm Cille was a prolific writer, and his monks became copyists and illuminators. Two manuscripts that

came to be associated with his school are the Books of Durrow and Kells, the latter a masterpiece of Celtic art.

A tradition, much at variance with the rest of his life, relates that, around 560, he became involved in a dispute with Saint Finian of Moville over a book of the psalms. Colm Cille had copied the manuscript under Saint Finian, intending to keep it, but Finian disputed his right to do so. The case went to court, where the judge ruled that, 'To every cow belongs its calf, and to every book its copy.' But Colm Cille did not accept the ruling. The dispute eventually led to a battle at Cúl Dreimhne in 561, in which many were killed. (The book came to be called the *Cathach*, from the Irish *cath*, meaning battle; it is now housed in the Irish Academy in Dublin.) A gathering of clerics and scholars threatened to excommunicate him, but Saint Brendan of Birr spoke on his behalf, with the result that he was allowed instead to go into exile. Colm Cille suggested that he work in Scotland to convert as many people as had been killed in the battle. He exiled himself from Ireland, to return only once, many years later, to found a monastery at Durrow.

In 561, accompanied by twelve followers, all relatives, he left Ireland for the island of Iona off the west coast of Scotland, and founded a monastery there in 563. (The Hebrew word *yonáh* means *dove*.) Many people were attracted by the lives of the monks and came to the island for prayer and reflection. To the monks he used to say, 'Love one another with mutual affection,' quoting Romans 12.10. They built a fleet of boats and set out in all directions in a form of life which was both missionary

and monastic; their monasteries were bases of operation over wide areas. They travelled to the British mainland and the islands of Scotland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and parts of England, teaching and preaching, building fifty-six churches and schools. For this reason, Colm Cille is called the Apostle of Scotland. But he loved the quiet life of a monk in his monastery, writing, ‘Dear cell, what happy hours I have spent in you, with the wind whistling through the loose stones and the sea spray clinging to my hair.’

Colm Cille had a powerful influence on the lives of the people he served. It was partly through him that the Scots became a strong and united people. He was given a role in naming the king, and the coronation ceremony was held in the church of Iona. In 574, he anointed Aodán mac Gabhráin as King of Dalriada. For the Gaelic warrior kings, Colm Cille was a useful asset. His monastery provided education for their sons, he was an adviser to the king, and he served as a diplomat to the Picts and the Irish. He was also a man of letters, writing several hymns and being credited with transcribing three hundred books. Through his reputation, and its position as a major European centre of learning, Iona became a place of pilgrimage. A network of Celtic high crosses marking processional routes developed around his shrine there.

During these years, Colm Cille kept in close contact with Ireland, ruling monasteries there from Iona. In 575, the High King of Ireland asked Colm Cille to attend and advise the Convention of Druim Cett in Derry, a

gathering of the bishops, kings and princes of Ireland. Afterwards, Colm Cille returned to Iona, where, in 593, his health began to fail. He died on Sunday, 9 June 597, and was buried in the church there. In 794, the Vikings began a series of assaults on Iona; within fifty years, they had caused its abandonment. Colm Cille's relics were finally removed in 849, and divided between Scotland and Ireland. The parts of the relics which went to Ireland are said to be buried with Saints Patrick and Brigid in Downpatrick, County Down, and at Saul church near Downpatrick.

Colm Cille might have remained a little-known figure were it not for Adomnán (Eunan), the ninth Abbot of Iona, who died in 704. His book, the *Vita Colum Cille* (*Life of Colm Cille*) spread Iona's fame across Christendom. It was described by the French historian, Charles de Montalembert in *The Monks of the West*, as 'one of the most vivid, most attractive and most authentic monuments of Christian history.' It was in three parts: prophecies, miracles, and apparitions. Another early source is a poem in praise of Colm Cille which almost certainly was written within three or four years of his death and is the earliest vernacular (that is, neither Greek nor Latin) poem in European history.

Colm Cille is regarded as a leading figure in the revitalization of monasticism. His achievements illustrate the importance of the Celtic church in reviving Christianity in Western Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire.

Here are some prayers attributed to him: -

‘Lord, be a bright flame before me, a guiding star above me, a smooth path below me, a kindly shepherd behind me - today, tonight and for ever.’

‘Almighty Father, Son and Holy Spirit, eternal ever blessed gracious God, to me the least of the saints, allow to me that I may keep a door in paradise, that I may keep the smallest door, the furthest, the darkest, coldest door, the door that is least used, the stiffest door, as long as it is in your house, Lord God, as long as I can see your glory even from afar, and hear your voice, and know that I am with you, God, for ever.’

‘The path I walk, Christ walks it. May the land in which I am be without sorrow. May the Trinity protect me wherever I stay, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Bright angels walk with me, and be present with me in all that I do.’

‘We ask you, Jesus, loving Saviour, to show yourself to us who seek you, so that we may know you and love you. May we love you alone, desire you alone and keep you always in our thoughts. May love for you possess our hearts, may affection for you fill our senses so that we may love all else in you.’

‘Jesus, King of glory, you know how to give greatly and you promise great things. Nothing is greater than yourself. We ask nothing else from you but yourself.’

You are our life, our light, our food, our drink, our God  
and our all.'

The common air to the hymn, 'The King of love my  
shepherd is,' is attributed to Colm Cille.

## THE MARTYRS OF IRELAND: 20 June

An interesting feature of the introduction and spread of the Christian faith in Ireland from the early fifth century is that, unlike most other churches at a similar stage, there were no martyrs. Perhaps the pagan druids were tolerant.

Later on, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially during the Cromwellian period, there were many martyrs who died for the faith or because of hatred of it. Although most of their names are forgotten, their faith and courage are remembered. The martyrs honoured today are from that period. There was no liturgical celebration of them until 1992 when they were beatified by Pope John Paul II. This calls to mind what Jesus said, 'I tell you solemnly: no prophet is ever accepted in his own country.' (Luke 4.24) In that year, seventeen of them, put to death for the faith between 1579 and 1654, were declared blessed.

Some of the information about them is uncertain. This may have been because some used aliases, perhaps in the hope of evading capture, and there have also been variant spellings in both Irish and English. The seventeen were: -

**Patrick O'Healy** was born about 1545 in Leitrim. He was educated in Spain, and became bishop in Mayo in 1576. In 1579, he and a fellow Franciscan, **Father Con** (Cornelius? Conrad?) **O'Rourke**, landed at Askeaton at



the same time as the invasion force of Spaniards and Italians landed at Smerwick harbour. They were captured and brought to Limerick. O'Healy was offered promotion if he would take the Oath of Supremacy. Both refused, were tried, found guilty of treason, and executed at Kilmallock on 22 (or 31) August 1579. In the church of Saints Peter and Paul, Kilmallock, there is a stained glass window of three martyrs - Bishop Patrick O'Healy, Fathers Con O'Rourke, and Maurice MacEnraghty, the latter a diocesan priest and native of Kilmallock who was martyred in Clonmel in 1585.

**Matthew Lambert** was a Wexford baker who arranged with five sailors to provide passage by ship out of Wexford for Viscount Baltinglass and his chaplain, the Jesuit, Robert Rochford. The authorities heard of the plan, and Matthew and the sailors were arrested. Questioned about politics and religion, Matthew replied, 'I am not a learned man. I am unable to debate with you, but I can tell you this: I am a Catholic and I believe whatever our Holy Mother the Catholic Church believes.' They were found guilty of treason, and were hanged, drawn and quartered in Wexford on 5 July 1581. Only three of the names of the five sailors are known – Robert Tyler (Meyler), Edward Cheevers and Patrick Cavanagh.

**Dermot Hurley** (or O'Hurley) was born in Tipperary about 1530. His family was well off, and as a young man he went to Louvain to study law. In 1581, Pope Gregory XIII asked him, while still a layman, to become Archbishop of Cashel. He accepted, even though he

knew this would make him a fugitive working in dangerous conditions. He reached Ireland in 1583, but while sheltering at Slane Castle, was recognised, arrested, and imprisoned in Dublin Castle. Accused of plotting to overthrow the government, he was repeatedly questioned and tortured. He persistently protested that his mission was one of peace, and that he had no information to give his captors. On 20 June 1584, he was taken to Hoggen Green, near St Stephen's Green, to be hanged. Before his death he said,

I am a priest anointed and also a bishop, although unworthy of such sacred dignities, and no cause could they find against me that might in the least degree deserve the pains of death, but only my function of priesthood wherein they have proceeded against me in all points contrary to their own laws.

After his execution his body was buried in Kevin St. church in Dublin. A monument to his memory was erected there in 1992.

**Margaret Ball** was born to Nicholas Bermingham and Catherine de la Hide, an Old English family, near Tara in Co. Meath about 1515. At the age of fifteen, she married Bartholomew Ball, a leading merchant in Dublin. His family built and operated a toll-bridge over the River Dodder in a place which came to be called Ballsbridge. They had many children, of whom five survived, Walter, Nicholas, Thomas, Katherine and Eleanor. (Their home was demolished in the 1970's.) In 1534, Bartholomew became mayor of Dublin. Following the passage of the

Acts of Supremacy and of Uniformity by Henry VIII's Parliament, Margaret gave shelter to priests and had Mass celebrated in her home, and taught the Catholic faith. Walter, her eldest son, who, like his father, had been elected mayor, became a Protestant and a bitter, hate-filled opponent of the Catholic faith. In 1581, on his orders, his mother was arrested, drawn through the streets on a hurdle, and thrown into a dungeon in Dublin Castle where the harsh conditions of life wore her down. (The dungeons are still there today.) She was arthritic, and her cell was cold, damp, and lit only by a candle. What must have been her greatest pain, however, was the knowledge that it was her own son who had brought this torment on her. Another son, Nicholas, on becoming mayor, wished to release her, but was prevented by law from doing so as she continued to refuse to accept the Acts. She died in prison in 1584, aged about seventy.

**Maurice McKenraghty** was born the son of a silversmith at Kilmallock. He enjoyed the patronage of the Earl of Desmond and, after ordination as a diocesan priest, became his chaplain and confessor. In September 1583, while a fugitive with the earl, he was surprised on Sliabh Luachra by Lord Roche's gallowglasses, and handed over to the Earl of Ormond, who ordered that he be chained to one Patrick Grant, and imprisoned in Clonmel. There he lay in irons, encouraging, teaching, and hearing confessions at his prison grate until 1585. His jailer was then bribed by Victor White, a leading man of the town, to release Maurice for one night to say Mass in White's house. But the jailer alerted the President of Munster to use the opportunity to capture at

the Mass those refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy. In the morning an armed force surrounded the house, arrested White and others, and looked for the priest everywhere. He had hidden under straw at the first alarm, and, though wounded when the heap was probed, ultimately escaped to the woods. However, learning that White's life could only be saved by his (Kenraghty's) surrender, he gave himself up, and was at once tried by martial law. Pardon and preferment were offered him if he agreed to conform, but he maintained the Catholic faith and the pope's authority, and was executed as a traitor on 20 April 1585. His head was set up in the market-place, but his body, bought from the soldiers, was buried behind the high altar of the Franciscan church.

**Dominic Collins** was born into a leading family in Youghal in 1566. Both his father and brother served as mayor of the town. He was well educated, perhaps by the Jesuits who had a school in Youghal at the time. He then went to France and served in both the French and Spanish armies. He joined the Jesuits as a lay brother in Spain in 1589, and in 1601 came back to Ireland with the fleet sent by King Philip III to assist the O'Neills and the O'Donnells. After the Battle of Kinsale, he retreated with O'Sullivan Beare to Dunboy Castle in west Cork, where, after a siege, he was captured, bribed in an attempt to get him to change his religion, and tortured. Eventually he was hanged in Youghal. Before his execution he spoke to the crowd, saying he longed for a martyr's death. The hangman refused to execute him and the soldiers forced a passer-by, a fisherman, to do it. Dominic died in 1602,

praying the words of the psalm, 'Into your hands I commend my spirit.'

**Conor O'Devaney** (or Devany) came from Raphoe in Co. Donegal, and entered the Franciscans in Donegal town as a young man around 1550. In 1582, while in Rome, he was appointed bishop of Down and Connor. He was one of six bishops who attended a synod in Clogher that promulgated the decrees of the Council of Trent in 1587. After the failure of the Spanish Armada in 1588 he was captured, but was released and went back to his diocese. In the years after the Flight of the Earls he was again taken prisoner, and brought to Dublin Castle in 1611. He was accused of colluding with Hugh O'Neill in treason. He admitted being in O'Neill territory as bishop during the Nine Years' War (1594-1603), but protested that he was being charged because of his religion. He was executed in 1612. (*See next entry.*)

**Patrick O'Loughran, who** came from Co. Tyrone, had been in Rome as chaplain to Hugh O'Neill, and later studied at the Irish College in Douai. Returning to Ireland, he was arrested on landing in Cork. He admitted he had been chaplain to Hugh O'Neill, had gone with him overseas, and had visited the pope. He and Bishop O'Devaney were executed at George's Hill in Dublin on 6<sup>th</sup> (or 11<sup>th</sup>) February 1612. The executions, intended to frighten Catholics, stiffened the resolve, not only of the Irish, but also of the Old English to remain faithful to the Catholic faith. (*See previous entry.*)

**Francis Taylor** was born into a wealthy family in Swords about 1550. He married Margaret Shelton, a grand-daughter of Blessed Margaret Ball. In 1595, he was elected Mayor of Dublin. A convinced Catholic, he refused to accept the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity and was imprisoned in 1614, remaining there until his death in 1621. He is said to be buried in the family grave in Saint Audeon's Church. A bronze sculpture of him, along with Blessed Margaret Ball, his grandmother-in-law, stands to the left of the main entrance to the Pro-Cathedral in Marlborough St., Dublin.

**Peter Higgins** was born in Dublin about 1600. By 1627, he was a Dominican priest residing in Spain. He returned to Ireland, probably in the 1630's, to become prior of Naas. While there, he tried to restrain the violence that took place in the rebellion of 1641, and to shelter the homeless. He intervened to save William Pillsworth, the Protestant rector of Donaghadea, who was about to be hanged by Catholics, and he criticized them for their unchristian behaviour. But he was arrested in 1642. Offered a chance to save his life by denying his faith, he said, 'I die a Catholic and a Dominican priest. I forgive from my heart all who have conspired to bring about my death. Deo gratias.' At least twenty Protestants who had known him urged that his life be spared. Among them was William Pillsworth, who shouted out, 'This man is innocent; this man is innocent; he saved my life.' But Sir Charles Coote had Peter executed, without trial, at Hoggen Green in Dublin, on 23 March 1642. No one knows where he is buried.

**Terence Albert O'Brien** was born into a farming family near Cappamore in east Limerick in 1601. He became a Dominican in 1621, taking the name of Albert. He studied in Spain, where he was ordained in 1627. Returning to Ireland, he served as prior in Limerick, and near Portumna, before becoming Provincial of the Irish Province in 1643. Not long after, he was appointed co-adjutor bishop of Emly. After the siege of Limerick in 1651, where he had encouraged citizens to resist Cromwell, he was captured, tried by court-martial, and condemned to death. As he went to death at Gallow's Green, on 31 (30) October 1651, he said to the people: 'Do not weep for me, but pray that being firm and unbroken in this torment of death, I may happily finish my course.' After being strangled, his body was left hanging for three hours and treated with contempt by soldiers. They cut off his head and spiked it on the river gate, where it remained incorrupt. His headless body was buried near the old Dominican priory in Limerick.

**John Kearney** was born in Cashel in 1619. He became a Franciscan and was ordained priest in 1642 after studies in Louvain, Belgium. He was captured on his return to Ireland, but managed to escape. He ministered as a priest, first in Cashel and later in Waterford. In 1653, he was captured again, taken to Clonmel, and charged with functioning as a priest in defiance of the law. Witnesses testified that he had celebrated and administered the sacraments. He was hanged on 11th March 1653.

**William Tirry** was born in Cork to a wealthy Anglo-Irish family in 1608. In two hundred years, from about

1500 to 1700, twenty of his family were mayors of Cork. Educated abroad, he became an Augustinian priest and secretary to his uncle, the bishop of Cork and Cloyne. He was arrested on Easter Sunday in Fethard and hanged in Clonmel on 12 (2) May 1654.

In addition, six Catholics of Irish birth or connection were executed for the faith in England: John Roche (alias Neale), John (Terence) Carey, Patrick Salmon, John Cornelius (alias John Conor) O'Mahoney, Charles Meehan and Ralph Corby (Corbington).

In 1651, Edmund Ludlow, an agent of Oliver Cromwell's in his attempted suppression of the Catholic faith in Ireland, travelling from Dundalk to Castleblayney, passed by a cave and found a group of people hiding in it. He ordered fires to be lit at its entrance to suffocate them. After several hours, his soldiers stormed the cave, but the first man to enter it was shot and wounded. Ludlow attempted what he called 'another smother.' But this did not succeed either, as the sheltering group had found air by lying on the ground beside the entry-point of a stream to the cave. After this failure, the soldiers again stormed the cave, this time unchallenged, and slaughtered the group, fifteen in all, men, women, children and a priest whose chalice, crucifix and vestments were nearby. (From Father Augustine OM Cap., *Ireland's Loyalty to the Mass*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2007, Neumann Press, Long Prairie, Minnesota, USA, pp.120 -121.)



## **SAINT OLIVER PLUNKETT: 1 July**

Oliver Plunkett was born in 1629 (or -5) in Lough Crew, Co. Meath, to a wealthy family of Irish Norman origin with many connections to titled families, including the earls of Fingall and Roscommon. Until his sixteenth year, his education was entrusted to his cousin, Patrick Plunkett, Abbot of Saint Mary's, Dublin, who later became bishop of Ardagh and of Meath. (The abbey was founded in 1139 by Benedictines from Savigny in France. Its recently conserved chapter-house may be visited on Meetinghouse Lane off Lower Abbey St.) In Oliver's youth, the Confederate Wars were raging and many of his relatives were involved in the Confederation of Kilkenny.

Oliver was admitted to the Irish College in Rome in 1647, was ordained priest in 1654, and deputed by the Irish bishops to act as their representative in Rome. Meanwhile, the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland (1649–53) had defeated the Catholic cause. Following this, the public practice of Catholicism was banned and Catholic clergy were executed. As a result, it was impossible for him to return to Ireland. For many years he remained in Rome, and, in 1657, became a professor of theology. Throughout the period of the Commonwealth and the first years of Cromwell's rule, he successfully pleaded the cause of the Irish church, while also serving as professor at the College of Propaganda Fide.

In 1669, Oliver was appointed Archbishop of Armagh. After twenty-three years in exile, he returned to Ireland

in 1670, since the restoration of the monarchy in England in 1660 had started on a tolerant basis. He set about reorganizing the church. In one four-year period he confirmed 4,000 people. He built schools for the young and for the clergy, whom he found 'ignorant in moral theology.' He tackled drunkenness among the clergy, writing, 'Let us remove this defect from an Irish priest, and he will be a saint.' The Penal Laws were relaxed a little in 1660, and he established a Jesuit College in Drogheda in 1670. A year later one hundred and fifty students attended, of whom no fewer than forty were Protestant, making it the first integrated school in Ireland.

On the enactment of the Test Act in 1673, the college was razed to the ground. Oliver went into hiding, and ignored a government order to register at a seaport to await passage into exile. As he travelled he used disguises, one of them being that of "Captain Brown", supposedly an army officer. He had earlier warned colleagues in Rome that they would likely hear rumours of his drinking and dancing in taverns, which sometimes also doubled as "houses of ill-fame".

In 1678, the so-called Popish Plot by Titus Oates led to further anti-Catholicism. Archbishop Peter Talbot of Dublin was arrested, and Plunkett again went into hiding. Despite being on the run, and with a price on his head, he refused to leave Ireland. The Privy Council in London was told he had plotted a French invasion. He was arrested in Dublin in 1679 and imprisoned in Dublin Castle, where he gave absolution to the dying Talbot.

He was released but re-arrested, and then tried at Dundalk in 1680 before an all-Protestant jury for conspiring to bring 20,000 French soldiers into the country, and for levying a tax on his clergy to support 70,000 men for rebellion. The prosecution witnesses were themselves wanted men and afraid to turn up in court, so the trial collapsed. But Oliver was not released.

The prosecution knew that Plunkett would never be convicted in Ireland, so he was moved to Newgate prison in London. At his second trial, in Westminster Hall, he was denied defence counsel or time to assemble his witnesses, and was frustrated in his attempts to obtain the criminal records of those who were to give evidence against him. Some of the prosecution evidence was perjured, supplied by two Franciscan friars whom he had disciplined for involvement in a scam about money. Oliver disputed the court's right to try him in England, and drew attention to the criminal past of the witnesses, but to no avail. Lord Chief Justice Sir Francis Pemberton, said to him,

Look you, Mr. Plunkett.... you have done as much as you could to dishonour God in this case; for the bottom of your treason was your setting up your false religion, than which there is not any thing more displeasing to God, or more pernicious to mankind in the world.

Within fifteen minutes the jury returned with a verdict of guilty. On being sentenced to death, Oliver said, 'Deo gratias. (Thanks be to God.)

On 11 July 1681, Plunkett became the last Catholic martyr to die in England, when he was hanged, drawn, disembowelled, quartered and beheaded at Tyburn. His remains were exhumed in 1683 and moved to a Benedictine monastery in Germany. His head is in Saint Peter's Church in Drogheda, while other relics are to be found at Downside in England, in Germany and in Ireland.

Oliver Plunkett was beatified in 1920 and canonized in 1975, the first new Irish saint for almost seven hundred years, and the first Irish martyr to be beatified. In 1997, he was declared patron saint of peace and reconciliation in Ireland.

## SAINT MALACHY: 3 November

Malachy O'More (in Irish Maol Mhaedhoc Ó Morgair, Malachy being an attempted Latinization) was born in Armagh in 1094. He was educated under Saint Celsus (Ceallach), the archbishop of Armagh known as "the peacemaker," because of his frequent interventions to help stop inter- and intra-tribal warfare. For a while, Malachy lived the life of a hermit, and found direction from a monk who later became abbot of Armagh. He also spent two years at the monastery of Lismore in Co. Waterford under St. Malchus. He was ordained priest in 1119. Celsus appointed Malachy his vicar during his absence administering the diocese of Dublin.

In 1122, Malachy became abbot of the monastery of Bangor, Co. Down, which he restored and re-organized along the lines of the Benedictine monasteries; he was influenced by the Cistercian reform movement in France. He became bishop of Connor about 1123, with Bangor as his seat of administration. In these positions, he made a name for himself as a reformer, romanizing the church in Armagh, Down and Connor.

There was a need for reform in the church. Centuries of isolation, and Scandinavian and Irish raids had led to a situation where Ireland was far from being the island of saints and scholars. Saint Bernard, in his *Life of Malachy* (the principal source of which is likely to have been Malachy himself), described the situation in far from complimentary terms. Malachy persuaded the Irish

church to accept Pope Gregory VII's reform which was then sweeping Europe; he also introduced the Roman liturgy. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux wrote of him, 'He used to travel round the country with a group of disciples who never left his side. He used to give the full measure of God's grain, even to those who gave him no thanks for it.'

It is possible that Bernard exaggerated the failings of the Irish church in order thereby to enhance the achievement of Malachy, his protégé, in remedying them, and, indirectly, his own reputation. Either way, this played into the hands of King Henry II of England who was happy to present himself to the pope as a reformer of the Irish church. In 1155, in the Bull *Laudabiliter (Praiseworthy)*, Pope Adrian IV – an Englishman, Nicholas Breakspear – “donated” Ireland to Henry by virtue of the *Donation of Constantine*. (For the *Donation*, see pp.838-842.)

About 1127, the diocese of Connor was laid waste by the King of Ulster. There were violent disputes over Malachy's position, compelling him to leave. He went to Iveragh, in Kerry, bringing with him monks from Bangor. They were welcomed by King Cormac MacCarthy of Desmond.

In 1129, Celsus, while dying, nominated Malachy as his successor, both as abbot and as archbishop, thus breaking the time-honoured Irish custom of hereditary succession. The abbey of Armagh had been ruled by laymen, and Malachy even had to buy the *Bachall Íosa*,

the “Staff of Jesus”, his symbol of office. Fear of more violent opposition caused him to delay acceptance, and he ruled the diocese and the province for five years without entering the city of Armagh. He re-built the cathedral and won recognition for Armagh as the primatial see. He was finally persuaded to accept his new position in 1132, but resigned it in 1137. He divided the diocese of Connor into Down and Connor, retaining the former. He founded a monastery of Augustinian Canons at Downpatrick.

To secure the *pallium* (the symbol of metropolitan jurisdiction) for his successor at Armagh, and for Cashel, he went to Rome in 1139, via Scotland, England and France, calling at Clairvaux, where he met Saint Bernard, the reformer of the Cistercians; they became firm friends. Pope Innocent II made him papal legate in Ireland, but refused to grant the *pallium*. Malachy introduced the Cistercians to Ireland with five monks from Clairvaux in France by founding Mellifont in Co. Louth in 1142. Its first leader was Christian, an Irishman.

Saint Bernard wrote of Malachy at this time that, ‘Having extirpated barbarism and re-established Christian morals, seeing all things tranquil, he began to think of his own peace.’ Malachy set out for Rome in a second attempt to gain the *pallium* for his successor but died at Clairvaux on 2 November 1148 in the arms of Saint Bernard. His last words were, ‘I have believed in God, and all things are possible to those who believe. I have loved God, and love will never fail.’ He was buried there in front of the high altar. (Five years later, Bernard

was buried alongside him.) Malachy was declared a saint by Pope Clement III on 6 July 1190, the first Irish person to be formally canonized.

No writings of his are known to exist. One falsely attributed to him is *The Prophecy of the Popes*, forged in 1590, consisting of a list of mottoes supposedly fitting popes from the mid-12th century to the end of time. According to this list, Pope Francis, with the motto of “the glory of the olive,” should be the last and should have been named Peter II. ‘In the ultimate persecution of the Holy Roman Church, Peter II shall sit; there will be many tribulations, after which the City of the Seven Hills shall be destroyed, and the awful Judge shall judge His people.’ There are people who believe it, perhaps also believing that Nostradamus worked for the CIA.

George Otto Simms, the late Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh, wrote of him,

To Malachy is due the restoration, re-organization, and re-unification of the Church in Ireland after the ravages of the Norsemen. In his time, the dioceses of Ireland were first organized as we know them. Under his leadership, the arrival of the Anglo-Normans was less of a disaster than it might have been. (From *Commemorating Saints and others of the Irish Church*, edited by Brian Mayne, The Columba Press, Dublin, 1999.)

The establishment of a regular hierarchy in the Irish church - the object of his life – was realized at the



Council of Kells, Co. Meath, in 1152. He was the dominant figure of church reform in twelfth-century Ireland, a man in the mould of Saint Boniface in Germany. His feast is celebrated on 3 November (in order not to clash with All Souls on 2 November).

## **ALL THE SAINTS of IRELAND: 6 November**

(Irish martyrs, nearly all from the Cromwellian period, are honoured on 20 June, the feast of the Martyrs of Ireland.)

Among the saints of Ireland, perhaps the best-known are the following, with their feast-days: -

**January 3:** Saint Munchin (Mainchin) is the patron saint of the diocese of Limerick. His traditional birthplace is Dail Cais, where a parish and old graveyard Cell Mainchin (Kilmanaheen) existed. In the seventh century he was granted Inis Sibtonn (Ibton) in the tidal waters of Limerick, in the region of which he founded a church and had a thriving religious community.

**January 5:** Saint Charles of Saint Andrew. John Andrew Houben was born in the Netherlands in 1821. He took vows as a Passionist in 1846 and came to Mount Argus in 1857. It was there that he spent most of his priestly life. He acquired a reputation as a healer, but his principal ministry was in the confessional. The poor of Dublin found in him a strong support. He died on 5 January 1893 and was canonized in 2007.

**January 15:** Saint Ita was born in Waterford of noble and Christian parents. Early on, she set her mind on serving Christ in religious life. She founded a monastery in Killeedy, Co. Limerick, which attracted a great variety

of young people. She was given the title of “foster-mother of the saints of Ireland.” She died in 570.

January 16: Saint Fursa (Fursey) was born in Ireland and became one of the great monastic missionaries abroad. He went first with his brothers Foillan and Ultan to live the monastic life in East Anglia. But, as great numbers continued to visit him there, he left Foillan as abbot and sought refuge in France around 644. A patron gave him a hermitage at Lagny on the Marne. He died about 650 at Mézerolles and was buried in Péronne, which became a great centre of devotion to him.

January 30: Saint Aidan or Maedoc (Mogue) was born around 550, probably in Co. Cavan. He studied under David in Wales, and, on his return, founded a monastery at Ferns. He became bishop there and was renowned for his generosity and kindness. He died in 626 and his *Lives* testify to his popularity both in Cavan and in Ferns.

**February 1:** Saint Brigid. See page 844.

February 7: Saint Mel died in 488. He is said to have been a Briton who came to Ireland with Patrick, with whom he worked until he was ordained in Ardagh. He is one of the earliest Irish saints and gave the religious veil to Saint Brigid.

February 11: Saint Gobnait is one of the best-loved saints in West Cork but not very much survives about her life. The main part of her life was spent in

Ballyvourney, Co. Cork, where there has always been a deep devotion to her, and which is a place of pilgrimage to this day, especially on Pentecost. Her gifts of caring for and curing the sick have been a significant part of her cult through the centuries. Her memorial coincides with the World Day of prayer for the Sick.

February 17: Saint Fintan was born in Leinster. He received his religious formation in Terryglass, Co. Tipperary, under the abbot Colm, and was deeply influenced by his penitential practices and the severity of his *Rule*. Fintan made his own foundation in Clonenagh, Co. Laois. He died in 603.

**March 5:** Kieran (Ciarán) of Saighir was born in Cape Clear, Co. Cork. He is numbered among the pre-Patrician saints of Ireland. He went to the Continent, where he was baptized and later ordained priest and bishop. He returned to his father's territory, Ossory, where he lived as a hermit. Disciples soon joined him and Saighir became a well-known monastery.

March 8: Saint Senan was born near Kilrush, Co. Clare. His family were prosperous farmers. His vocation seems to have resulted from an experience of danger at sea. His early studies were made mainly at the monastery at Cilnamanagh, County Kilkenny. His principal monastic foundation was on Scatterry Island, near Kilrush, in the Shannon Estuary. He was *anam chara* to Ciaran of Clonmacnoise and to Brendan. He died in 544.

March 11: Saint Aengus was a monk in Clonenagh, Co. Laois, who came to the monastery of Tallaght, near Dublin, at the end of the eighth century during the abbacy of Maelruain to spend a period under his direction. He was renowned for his devotion to both foreign and local saints and composed two martyrologies. He returned to Clonenagh where he became abbot and bishop. He died around 824.

March 17: Saint Patrick. See page 141.

March 21: Saint Enda is considered to be one of the three great late vocations (*athlaech*) of Ireland. His sister, Faencha, a nun, set his thoughts on a religious vocation. He made a small foundation in Cell Aine, Co. Louth, and, after studies in Scotland under Ninian, made several foundations in the Boyne valley. On Faencha's urging he went to Aran. He died, probably in 520, and is considered as one of the early models of ascetic monasticism in Ireland.

March 24: Saint Macartan belongs to a very early generation of saints in Ireland and is recognized as the first bishop of Clogher. For his dedication and fidelity, he is known as Saint Patrick's "Strong Man."

**April 1:** Saint Ceallach (Celsus) was born in 1080. He became abbot of Armagh in 1105 and was ordained priest. He was influenced by the reform then in progress in Munster. He presided at the Synod of Rathbreasail in 1111, and was known as Celsus the peace-maker for his

work in helping to prevent warfare. In 1129, on a visitation of Munster, he died and was buried in Lismore in accordance with his own request.

April 18: Saint Laserian (Molaise) worked in both Ireland and Scotland in the seventh century and later entered the monastery at Leighlin, where he became abbot. His monastery thrived and gave its name to the diocese established in 1110. He adopted church discipline in accordance with Roman practice and introduced the Roman method of calculating the date of Easter. He died in 639.

April 27: Saint Asicus was Saint Patrick's expert craftsman in metal work and accompanied him on his journeys. He was left in charge of the church in Elphin which Patrick is said to have founded.

**May 4:** Saint Conleth is believed to have come from Wicklow. While living as a hermit he was persuaded by Brigid to act as priest for her community in Kildare. He was venerated as a great saint. Cogitosus, in his *Life of Brigid*, calls him bishop and abbot of the monks of Kildare. He was buried alongside Brigid in the great church there.

May 5: Blessed Edmund Rice. See page 849.

May 10: Saint Comgall was born around 516 in Co. Antrim. His father was a soldier who wished his son to follow in his steps, but Comgall wished to become a

soldier of Christ. He studied under Finnian of Moville and deepened his life of prayer to counteract his temptations to boredom and homesickness. He was persuaded to become a priest and then established a monastery at Bangor around 555-558, which attracted people like Columbanus. He also founded a monastery at Tiree in Scotland. After a long illness, he died at Pentecost 602 or 05.

May 15: Saint Carthage (Mochuta) hailed from a rich family in Kerry. As he loved the chanting of the psalms, the local king arranged for him to become a priest. Having spent a year, possibly at Bangor, he founded his own monastery at Rahan in 595. It grew rapidly. However, opposition made him move southwards, around 637. Along with hundreds of monks and their patients from a leper colony, he finally arrived at Lismore, where he made a foundation. He died in 638.

May 16: Saint Brendan was a native of Kerry who was born in 486. He studied at Clonard under Finnian. His name is connected with many places in Kerry such as Ardfert and Mount Brandon. He visited Scotland and reached the Hebrides and possibly areas beyond, such as the Faroes. He founded a monastery at Clonfert in 568 and died there in 578. The *Navigatio Brendani*, a purported description of his voyages in search of the "Islands of the Blest," written several hundred years later, is widely considered to be of little historical value.

**June 3:** Saint Kevin was a native of Leinster and spent his early years in Cilnamanagh (Irish: the church of the monks), Co. Kilkenny, where he received religious formation. Wishing to be a hermit, he crossed the mountains to Glendalough (the Valley of the Two Lakes), and settled at the foot of the upper lake. But followers began to gather around him, and gradually a monastery developed which may have combined communal and eremitical life. It became famous as a centre of prayer, learning and pilgrimage.

Legends that have grown up around Kevin depict him, in his relations with animals, as a precursor of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Little is known about his life in Glendalough beyond the date of his death in 618. But it is clear that he there established something lasting. Among its students was Saint Laurence O'Toole who became its abbot in 1154. Later, as archbishop of Dublin, he used to spend Lent there each year. The monastery at Glendalough remained in place for over six centuries until it was destroyed by the Normans in 1214, seemingly because they saw it as a rival centre to Dublin.

In recent decades, it has recovered some of its former role as a place of prayer and pilgrimage with the presence there of retreat houses and hermitages.

June 6: Saint Jarlath. See page 854.



June 7: Saint Colman (Mocholmóc) of Dromore, Co. Down, spent most of his life in that area. Possibly he studied under Caetan of Nendrom, Co. Down, and was persuaded by Saint Mac Nissi to settle in Dromore about 514.

June 9: Saint Colm Cille (Columba). See page 855.

June 14: Saint Davnet lived and died at Tydavnet, at Sliabh Beagh, Co. Monaghan. Tradition speaks of her as a virgin and as founder of a church or monastery. A *bachall* (staff) said to have been hers was preserved and in the past was used as a test of truth.

June 20: The Martyrs of Ireland. See page 861.

**July 1:** Saint Oliver Plunkett. See page 870.

July 6: Saint Moninne of Killeavy was one of Ireland's early women saints. After instruction on the religious life, she founded a community which initially consisted of eight virgins and a widow with a baby at Sliabh Gullion, Co. Armagh. They lived an eremitical life, based on that of Elijah and Saint John the Baptist. Moninne died in 517 or 518.

July 7: Saint Maelruain (Maolruain), bishop and abbot, founded the monastery of Tallaght, Co. Dublin, in 774. Important liturgical and spiritual writings emerged from the movement associated with him known as the Céile Dé (vassal of God) ascetical reform. He died in 792.

July 8: Saint Kilian was born in the parish of Mullagh in the diocese of Kilmore. With eleven companions he left Ireland and became known as the apostle of Thuringia and eastern Franconia. With Kolonat and Totnan he was put to death in 689. There is a very strong devotion to him in Würzburg, where his remains lie, and also throughout the Bavarian countryside.

July 24: Saint Declan is considered to be one of the pre-Patrician saints. He was of noble blood. Colman, a local priest, baptized him. Later he went to Europe to continue his studies where he was ordained priest and possibly bishop. He settled in Ardmore and evangelized the Decies country (mostly Waterford).

**August 9:** Saint Nathy is said to have been born in the barony of Leyny, Co. Sligo. He made a foundation in Achonry, where many students gathered to learn from him. He is buried in Achadh Cain.

August 9: Saint Felim was born in the sixth century in Breifne. He was a hermit near Kilmore, Co. Cavan, where he later founded a monastery. He is patron of Kilmore diocese.

August 12: Saint Muredach is regarded as the founder of the church in Killala, Co. Mayo. He may also be the founder and patron of the monastery of Inis Murray off the Sligo coast.

August 12: Saint Attracta lived in the sixth or seventh century. Local tradition remembers her great healing powers. Her convents were famous for hospitality and charity to the poor.

August 12: Saint Lelia (Liadain) had a church at Kileely, near Thomond Bridge. She is said to have been baptized by Saint Patrick.

August 13: Saint Fachtna (also called Fachanan) founder of the monastery of Ross Carbery (Ros Ailithir). He died around 600. His monastery became the principal one in west Cork and later a famous school of scripture.

August 23: Saint Eugene (Eoghan) lived in the sixth century and was said to have been taken to Britain by pirates. On obtaining his freedom he went to study at Candida Casa. Returning to Ireland he made a foundation at Cilnamanagh in the Wicklow hills, but his principal foundation was at Ardstraw (Ard Sratha), Co. Tyrone.

August 30: Saint Fiacre was an Irishman who went abroad to seek a hermitage. He passed through Normandy and eventually met Faro, who was a great patron of Irish pilgrims at Meaux. Fiacre was given a hermitage near Breuil and there he stayed until his death around 670.

August 31: Saint Aidan of Lindisfarne was of Irish descent and was a monk of Iona. When Oswald, the exiled king of Northumbria, who had fled for refuge to

Iona, returned to his throne in 634, he invited Aidan to come and re-convert his people. Aidan made his headquarters at Lindisfarne. With the aid of the king as interpreter he was very successful in his mission. He died in 651.

**September 4:** Saint Mac Nissi, whose baptismal name was Oengus, took his name from his mother, Ness, or Cnes. It is claimed that Saint Patrick baptized him and taught him the psalms. He chose the district of Connor for his hermitage, and later became bishop of his clan. He died early in the sixth century.

September 9: Saint Ciaran was born in Roscommon around 512. He went to Clonmacnoise in January 545 where he founded a monastery which was to become one of the most renowned in Europe. He died at the age of thirty-three while the monastery was still being built.

September 12: Saint Ailbe is sometimes claimed as one of the pre-Patrician saints, but annals note the date of his death as 528. A tradition held that he went to Rome and was ordained bishop by the pope. He founded the monastery of Emly which became very important in Munster. A ninth-century *Rule* bears his name.

September 23: Saint Eunan (Adomnán) was born about 624 into the same royal family in Donegal as Colm Cille (Columba). As ninth abbot of Iona from 679, he was a diplomat, peacemaker and writer. He wrote a *Vita Columbae*, a life of Saint Colm Cille, which is also a

source for the history of Iona, of Celtic monasticism and of the social and religious conditions of the time. Its description of the rite of anointing of kings influenced the development of kingship in Europe. Another work, *On the Holy Places*, (*De Locis Sanctis*) while purporting to be a pilgrims' guide to the Holy Land, was more likely written as an aid in solving exegetical problems; it may be a copy of a book by a French bishop, Arculf. It was one of the first books in print. In 686, Eunan travelled to Northumbria in England and gained the release of Irish captives there.

Eunan was responsible for an assembly of leaders from Scotland, England and Ireland, held near Birr, Ireland, in 697, which passed what came to be known as the *Law of Adomnán*, (the *Lex Innocentium*) a kind of early Geneva Convention, which provided protection for women, children and civilians, especially in time of war. It prohibited murder, rape and slander, stating, 'Great is the sin when anyone kills one who is the mother and sister to Christ's mother.' Penalties for infringement came to be known as the *Cáin Adomnáin* (Eunan's tax). Eunan also compiled a series of canons, laws on church affairs, which are found in the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*. He died on 23 September 704.

September 25: Saint Finbarr came to Loch Irce (Gougane Barra) in Co. Cork and lived there as a hermit. When disciples gathered round him, he moved to Cork at the mouth of the River Lee where he founded a monastery that became a famous centre of learning.

(University College Cork has the motto, ‘Where Finbarr taught, let Munster learn.’)

**October 3:** Blessed Columba Marmion. Joseph Marmion was born in Dublin on 1 April 1858 and ordained priest in Rome for Dublin diocese in 1881. He served as curate in Dundrum and then as professor in Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, before entering the Benedictine abbey of Maredsous, Belgium, in 1886. In 1909, he was elected abbot. A prolific writer, his trilogy *Christ, the Life of the Soul*, *Christ in his Mysteries*, and *Christ, the Life of the Monk*, have been among the most influential writings of the twentieth century and are still widely read. He also wrote, *Christ, Ideal of the Priest*, *Union with God*, *Come to Christ all you who labour*, and *Words of Life on the Margin of the Missal*. They draw substantially on scripture, patristic sources and Benedictine liturgical tradition. His aim in life was to bring people to God and to bring God to people; that was what motivated his writings. He died on 30 January 1923. One of his sayings was, ‘Christ gives himself to us according to the measure of the desire that we have to receive him.’

October 11: Saint Canice was born to a poor family in Co. Derry around 527. He studied at Clonard under Finian and in Glasnevin, Dublin, under Mobhi. A deep friendship developed between him and Saint Columba, with whom he worked for a time in Scotland, where he set up a number of churches. In Ireland, his principal foundation was at Aghaboe in Ossory, but this was

replaced centuries later by his church in Kilkenny. He died in 603.

October 16: Saint Gall was a monk of Bangor, Co. Down, and set out with Columbanus for the Continent. When Columbanus was exiled from France, Gall accompanied him to Bregenz on Lake Constance. When Columbanus cross the Alps into Italy, Gall remained in Switzerland. He lived in a hermitage which later became the monastery of Sankt Gallen. He died around 630.

October 25: Blessed Thaddeus MacCarthy was born in 1455. His appointment as bishop of Ross met with local opposition. He went to Rome to appeal against this. Pope Innocent VIII appointed him bishop of Cork and Cloyne. On his return journey, travelling on foot, he died in the northern Italian town of Ivrea in 1492.

October 27: Saint Otteran, a descendant of Conal Gulban, is usually identified with Odhran who preceded Columba in Iona. His death is recorded in 548 and his grave was greatly revered in Iona. He was chosen by the Vikings as patron of the city of Waterford in 1096 and later became patron of the diocese.

October 29: Saint Colman came from Kilmacduagh, Co. Clare, in the seventh century. After studying on the Aran Islands, where he founded two churches on Inis Mór, he returned to make a foundation at Kilmacduagh.

October 31: Blessed Dominic Collins. See page 865.

**November 3:** Saint Malachy. See pages 874-878..

November 14: Saint Laurence O'Toole. See pages 895-901.

November 23: Saint Columbanus. See page 756.

November 25: Saint Colman was born around 530, probably in west Cork. A bard by profession, he is reputed to have been influenced by Saint Brendan to become a priest. His apostolate was to east Cork, and his main foundation was at Cloyne.

November 27: Saint Fergal (Virgil) lived first in France and then in Bavaria where he founded the monastery of Chiemsee. He was appointed bishop of Salzburg around 754 and died in 784, leaving a reputation for holiness and learning.

**December 12:** Saint Finnian studied in Idrone, Co. Carlow, and later in Wales. On his return he settled in Clonard, Co. Meath around 520, where he established a famous school. His pupils, among whom were Canice, Colm Cille and Brendan, were the initiators of the great monastic expansion in Ireland. He died in 549 and is remembered as the tutor of the saints of Ireland.

December 18: Saint Flannan lived in the seventh century and was the son of a king of Thomond. He entered Molua's monastery at Killaloe and became abbot there. He is remembered as a great preacher.



December 20: Saint Fachanan. Although little is known with certainty about him, a strong tradition from early times links him with Kilfenora and records that he founded a church or monastery there in the sixth century. He is venerated as the patron of the diocese of Kilfenora, now part of Galway.

The Irish saints come in clusters: - the first is those from the centuries soon after Saint Patrick; then two of the Norman period who, unlike their predecessors, were formally canonized, Saints Malachy and Laurence O'Toole; then the martyrs of the Cromwellian period and Oliver Plunkett; then the founders, like Blessed Edmund Rice and other holy people not yet canonized like Mary Aikenhead of the Irish Sisters of Charity, Catherine Macauley of the Mercy Sisters, Nano Nagle of the Presentation Sisters; then nineteenth century saints such as Columba Marmion and Charles of Mount Argus, and, finally, holy men and women of the twentieth century, Matt Talbot, Frank Duff, Edel Quinn and Alfie Lambe.

There are also many locally remembered saints, such as Ronan, Dympna and others.

In addition, there are the Irish martyrs of the Penal Days whose memory is honoured on 20 June.

## **SAINT LAURENCE O'TOOLE: 14 November**

Laurence (Lorcán in Irish) was born in 1128 at Castledermot, County Kildare, Ireland, the youngest of four sons of an O'Byrne princess and Muirheartach O'Toole. He was a contemporary of Saint Malachy of Armagh. The family resided at Mullaghmast, also in Kildare.

At the age of ten, Laurence was sent as a hostage to the infamous Dermot MacMurrough, King of Leinster, as a pledge of his father's loyalty. Of Dermot it was said that every man's hand was against him, and his hand was against every man. Laurence was imprisoned for two years under starvation conditions. But the abbot of Glendalough intervened on his behalf and his situation improved. After his release, Laurence stayed at Glendalough and freely joined the monastery, spending twenty-two years there in all.

Laurence became abbot of Glendalough at the age of twenty-six. The monastery and its surroundings had been plundered thirteen times by Norsemen and local Irish. He wished to strengthen the bonds between the Irish Church and Rome since he saw this as the way to achieve needed reform. Through his example, he brought spiritual renewal to the church in Ireland and sought to marry the best in the Celtic monastic tradition and the European monastic movements. He invited the Canons of Saint Augustine to come and assist in the reform of the abbey and he became a member of the Augustinian

Order himself. A famine raged during the first four months of his administration, but Laurence served the poor personally, using his family inheritance as well as the monastery's resources.

At the age of thirty-two, he was unanimously chosen as archbishop of Dublin. He was the first Irishman – and the last for several centuries - chosen for the see of this city which had been founded only about a hundred years earlier and was first ruled by Danes and Norwegians. Dublin and Tuam had become archdioceses in 1152 at the Synod of Kells. Laurence, unlike his predecessors, owed allegiance to Armagh, not Canterbury. It is notable that his nomination was backed not only by the High King Ruairi O'Connor, but by Dermot MacMurrough who had by then married Laurence's sister, by the monastic community at Glendalough, and also by the clergy and population of Dublin.

He played a prominent part in the Irish church reform movement of the twelfth century. To assist in the spiritual formation of the priests and people of the diocese, Laurence invited Augustinian canons to become part of the cathedral chapter, and from this reformed community several new bishops were chosen. In 1173, he laid the foundation stone for the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity (now called Christ Church), and rebuilt several parish churches, including Saint Michan's on Church St., originally founded in 1096 and still in use today. He also adopted Gregorian chant.

In a Dublin that was so prosperous it was called ‘the city of gold, silver and all precious things,’ there were many poor and neglected, and Laurence cared for them. There was appalling poverty, so, each day, he fed the poor of the city in his home, inviting wealthy guests and beggars to the same table so as to encourage the former to do the same for the latter. He also established care centres for children who had been abandoned by their parents or who were orphaned. Each Lent he used to go to Glendalough on retreat, living in a cave not far from the monastery which Saint Kevin had used.

In 1166, Laurence's brother-in-law, Dermot, was deposed as King of Leinster by an alliance of Irish kings and princes, led by the High King, Ruairi O'Connor, and King Tiernán O'Rourke of Breifni whose wife he had abducted. He went into exile, but, after much wandering in Wales, England and France, returned to Ireland in 1169 with a vague promise of help from King Henry II of England, and a group of Norman, Flemish and Welsh allies to help him regain his kingdom.

Dublin was a walled city, but the citizens were terrified by the Norman knights and men-at-arms, who had a reputation for cruelty. People appealed to Laurence to save them and to make a treaty with the Anglo-Normans. He went out to their camp. While he appealed to them, two of the Norman knights with their followers made a breach in the walls of the city and entered the streets. They burned houses and killed unarmed people. When the noise reached the camp, Laurence hurried back and succeeded in stopping the slaughter.

The upshot was that Dermot was reinstated as King of Leinster, the Norse towns of Wexford, Waterford and Dublin were captured, and the Irish under the High King were defeated. To seal the alliance, Dermot offered his daughter, Aoife - Laurence's niece - in marriage to the leader of the Normans, Strongbow.

Laurence acted as mediator again when the King of Dublin unsuccessfully tried to recapture his town and also when O'Connor laid siege. Laurence had taken a leading part in raising an army to help O'Connor retake Dublin, but when he saw that the Irish were no match for the Normans, he came to the view that it was best to make a deal with the latter. He was a national figure greatly in demand as a mediator, the one man everyone trusted. Irish, Vikings, Normans - all respected him.

The arrival of King Henry II of England in Dublin as Lord of Ireland on 11 November 1171 had a number of objectives: first, to rein in his former Norman subjects before they established a kingdom to rival his; second, to receive the submission of the Irish kings and princes; third, to arrange a synod at Cashel. This was to bring Ireland into line with church observances as practised in Henry's other domains in England and France. Two of the statutes concerned the marriage laws of the Irish clergy – Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) had said that ‘the Irish change their wives like they change their horses’ - and the granting of the Rock of Cashel to the church. It was also used to try to bring the church in Ireland under the jurisdiction of Canterbury, and therefore, indirectly, of Henry. In the process, Pope

Alexander III in 1172 confirmed the Bull *Laudabiliter* of Pope Adrian IV – an Englishman, Nicholas Breakspear – in 1155 to “donate” Ireland to Henry under the terms of the *Donation of Constantine*. The implications of all this seem to have sunk in only after Henry's departure in April 1172. O'Connor sent Laurence to London to negotiate a settlement with Henry.

The Treaty of Windsor was a pact between O'Connor and Henry II acknowledging Henry's right to the lordship of Leinster, Meath and areas occupied by his Norman subjects. Laurence persuaded Henry to acknowledge O'Connor's right to the High Kingship and to his lands.

During the negotiations, while Laurence was saying Mass in Canterbury at the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket, he was attacked by a madman. The man had heard of Laurence's reputation and had the idea of giving the church another martyr so he clubbed him on the head. Unlike Becket, Laurence, although knocked to the floor, was able to recover and finish the Mass.

Laurence left Ireland in 1179 to attend the Third Council of the Lateran in Rome, accompanied by five other bishops. From Pope Alexander III he received a papal bull, confirming the rights and privileges of the see of Dublin. Alexander also named him as papal legate. On his return to Ireland, he kept up the pace of reform to such an extent that as many as one hundred and fifty clerics were withdrawn from their offices for various abuses and sent to Rome.

In 1180, he left Ireland for the last time, taking with him a son of O'Connor as hostage to Henry. He meant to admonish Henry for incursions against O'Connor, contrary to the terms of the Treaty of Windsor. But Henry took care to avoid meeting him, intercepted his correspondence with the pope, and blocked his return to Ireland by closing the western ports against him.

Laurence went to France to try and meet Henry, but became ill and was brought to the abbey of Saint Victor at Eu in Normandy. Mortally ill, it was suggested that he should make his will. He replied, 'God knows, I haven't a penny under the sun to leave to anyone.' His last thoughts were of the people in Dublin, 'Alas, you poor, foolish people, what will you do now? Who will take care of you in your trouble? Who will help you?' He died on 14 November 1180, aged about fifty-two.

Laurence was described as tall and graceful in appearance. He was known as ascetic, wore a hair shirt, never ate meat, and fasted every Friday on bread and water. In contrast to this, it is said that when he entertained, his guests lacked for nothing while he drank water coloured to look like wine so as not to spoil the feast.

Due to the claimed great number of miracles that occurred either at his tomb or through his intercession, he was canonised in 1225 by Pope Honorius III.

### **Note on Dermot MacMurrough**

According to the *Annals of the Four Masters*, Dermot MacMurrough, Laurence's brother-in-law, died 'without a will, without penance and without unction, as his evil deeds deserved.' However, the *Book of Leinster* says that he died, 'after the victory of unction and penance; thenceforward is the miserable reign of the Saxons, amen, amen.'

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'In the saints one thing becomes clear: those who draw near to God do not withdraw from people.' (Pope Benedict XVI)



## Explanatory Notes

**Albigensianism:** Manicheism (see below) as practised in the city of Albi in Provence, France, in the eleventh century. It was crushed by a twenty-year long crusade launched by Pope Innocent III in the thirteenth century. (See also Cathars below.)

**Arianism** Not to be confused with the Aryanism of Nazi ideology, Arianism is associated with a fourth-century priest of Alexandria, Egypt, called Arius; it involved a denial of the divinity of Christ.

**Cathars:** a Christian sect, influenced by Manicheism (see below), founded in the Balkans in the tenth century, and there called Bogomils. They became identified with the Albigensians and were destroyed along with them. (Greek: *catharoi*, the pure.)

**Doctor of the Church** A formal title granted to just over twenty saints whose teaching has been of exceptional benefit to the Church. (Latin *doctor*, teacher.)

**Gnosticism:** A first-to-third century movement in which people - Gnostics - claimed to possess a secret oral tradition from Jesus revealed only to a chosen few. (Greek, *gnosis*, knowledge.)

**Manichaeism:** a dualistic and gnostic religion founded in Persia by Manes (216-276), who called himself an apostle of Jesus Christ. It includes elements of

Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. Presenting itself as the solution to the age-old problem of evil, its origin and nature, it saw matter as evil, brought into being by an evil deity; only the spiritual was good. Murder, abortion, starvation and suicide were good as they released the spirit from the matter of the body; conception was evil as it imprisoned the spirit in matter. It spread widely from China to Western Europe but was destroyed in the Albigensian Crusade. The Albigensians, Bogomils and Cathars were Manicheistic.

**Marcionism** was a view that the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) had been made redundant by the coming of Jesus and should therefore be disregarded by Christians. It was never accepted by the Christian faith community.

**Monophysitism/monophysite:** the idea that there is only one nature in Jesus Christ; orthodox tradition holds to a duality of nature, human and divine, in him. (From the Greek: *monos*, one; *physis*, nature.)

**Novatianism:** A Roman priest, Novatian, held that Christians who had lapsed from the faith during persecution had excluded themselves from the church, and the only way back for them was by re-baptism. Most Christians held that there was no such thing as re-baptism, but that, as long as people repented sincerely and did penance, they should be re-admitted to the community of faith, usually by the bishop. Novatian tried to be elected Bishop of Rome but Cornelius was chosen instead. Novatian formed his own church which lasted until the sixth century.

**Patrologia Graeca** (PG): a collection in 162 volumes of the writings of the Greek Fathers of the Church, edited by Fr. Jacques Paul Migne, published in Paris, 1857-1866. (Latin: pater, father; logos, word, saying.)

**Patrologia Latina** (PL): a collection in 221 volumes of the writings of the Latin Fathers of the Church, edited by Fr. Jacques Paul Migne, published in Paris, 1844-1864. (Latin: pater, father; logos, word, saying.)

## Acknowledgements

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Other sources are listed in the text where they are used.

The unequal length of entries in the book is because of the varied availability of sources.

## Afterword

I should love to see the liturgical calendar reformed so as to make it more catholic, by, for example: -

- bringing in more saints from all over the church; at present it has a heavily European bias.
- having more married men and women, and single laypeople, e.g. Frank Duff, Edel Quinn, and fewer founders of religious orders.
- having more recent saints. It is difficult for people to connect with some of the saints, e.g. Eusebius, Sixtus, Pontianus and Hippolytus.
- removing from the calendar those whose canonizations were politically motivated, whether by church or civil politics, and those whose existence is a matter of real doubt.
- removing those who are difficult to see as examples of the Christian life for the faithful to follow, e.g. Cyril of Alexandria, Vincent Ferrer, Bernardine of Siena, etc.
- by making more room in local calendars for locally or nationally known saints.

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