

Handouts for All Saints Session

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Opening Prayer Service

Opening Prayer

Leader

God of holiness, we thank you for giving the saints the power of your grace so that they were enabled to use their gifts in great ways. May their prayers encourage each of us to find our own way of holiness. We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading

1 John 3:1a

*"See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God."
The Word of the Lord.*

Reflection

Leader

Children of God. That's what we are. That's what the saints are. Children of God who receive great gifts from the loving Father. I invite you to close your eyes for a moment and think about a gift you once received from a loving parent in your life. (Pause) That parent could be your mother or father, a grandparent, or someone else who is like a parent to you. Think of a very special gift you received from that person.

That gift is a sign of your parent's love for you. Think about what you did with the gift after you received it. Did you use it all by yourself, or did you use it with other people? Did it bring you happiness? Did it bring others happiness in some way? Usually the best gifts we receive help us to give to others in some way or another. If you haven't yet used this gift for or with others in some way, think for a moment about how you might share this gift with someone.

Litany

Leader

Our response to the litany will be, "Bless us, children of God."

Leader

Holy saints of God, we praise the Lord for the generous ways in which you have shared your gifts with the world, we pray...

All

Bless us, children of God.

Leader

Holy saints of God, we are thankful to the Church for telling us your stories for century after century, we pray...

All

Bless us, children of God.

Leader

Holy saints of God, pray for us as we seek to become holy by accepting God's gift to us, we pray...

All

Bless us, children of God.

Leader

Holy saints of God, pray for us as we seek to become holy by using the gifts God has given to us, we pray...

All

Bless us, children of God.

Leader

Holy saints of God, pray for us so that the sharing of our gifts will increase faith, hope, and love in the world, we pray...

All

Bless us, children of God.

Closing Prayer

Leader

God has given all of you a special gift, a spiritual gift, because you are a child of God. God loves you and gives you the greatest gifts. Let us pray that we will always use God's great gifts to express our love for others. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All

Amen

Scrambled Saints

	Name of Saint	Detail about Saint
1.	TREPE	
2.	CISLHNAO	
3.	LAPU	
4.	CANRIFS	
5.	RAMY	
6.	BILZHEEAT	
7.	SATMHO	
8.	EWRLACNE	
9.	JOEMER	
10.	TAYHNON	
11.	EDUJ	
12.	DNBTCEEI	
13.	CIMAOHJ	
14.	AAMHRT	
15.	COAMIN	
16.	CMNDIIO	
17.	SOER	
18.	TIANSUGI	
19.	PPYALRO	

Saint Interviews

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Setting: A school classroom. Elizabeth is cleaning up at the end of the day.

1. What's your name?
2. Where are you from?
3. Where were you born? What year?
4. What is special about you being born in New York City?
5. Tell us a little bit about your family.
6. Were you born Catholic?
7. How did you become Catholic?
8. I see you're cleaning up after a day of work. Tell us about the work you do.
9. What would you say is God's special gift just for you?

St. Benedict

Setting: A chapel in a monastery. Benedict is on his way outside with a tool (rake, hoe, or shovel) in his hand.

1. What's your name?
2. Where are you from?
3. When were you born?
4. What are times like here in the 6th century?
5. I see your leaving your chapel with a gardening tool in your hand. What is that all about?
6. People say that you're an expert at helping people get along in communities. Can you tell us a few of your secrets?
7. I've heard that only men live here in your monastery. What is a woman to do if she wants to enjoy the fruits of your labor?
8. What do people mean when they talk about "Benedictine hospitality?"
9. What would you say is God's special gift just for you?

St. Paul

Setting: St. Paul is sitting at a simple table writing a letter.

1. What's your name?
2. Was that always your name?
3. What were you like when you were Saul?
4. Tell us about your conversion experience.
5. What are gentiles?
6. Why are they so important to you?
7. I understand you are quite a traveler. Tell us about some of your journeys.
8. What are you writing?
9. What is so special about your letter writing?
10. What would you say is God's special gift just for you?

St. Teresa of Avila

Setting: Teresa is praying fervently in a simple chapel. It would be great if you could make it appear like she is levitating.

1. What is your name?
2. Where are you from?
3. I understand that you used to enjoy the high life, even after you became a nun. Tell us about that.
4. What happened? Why are you living in such simple conditions here?
5. There are rumors flying around that you're the flying nun. What's that all about?
6. I understand you're a great writer. How has your writing changed your life and the life of the Church?
7. What would you say is God's special gift just for you?

Saints Profiles

The following Saints Profiles are used throughout the All Saints activities. They are designed to be used by leaders to share the story of the saints and as participant handouts (for older children through adults). They are arranged in chronological order by feast day or anniversary date.

- ◆ St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (January 4)
- ◆ St. John Bosco (January 31)
- ◆ St. Scholastica (February 10) and St. Benedict (July 11)
- ◆ Blessed Katharine Drexel (March 3)
- ◆ Archbishop Oscar Romero (March 24)
- ◆ Sr. Thea Bowman (March 30)
- ◆ St. John Baptist de la Salle (April 7)
- ◆ Blessed Damien of Molokai (April 15)
- ◆ St. Joan of Arc (May 30)
- ◆ Pope John XXIII (June 3)
- ◆ St. Peter and St. Paul (June 29)
- ◆ St. Benedict (July 11)
- ◆ St. Ignatius of Loyola (July 31)
- ◆ St. Clare (August 11)
- ◆ St. Maximilian Kolbe (August 14)
- ◆ St. Hildegard of Bingen (September 17)
- ◆ St. Vincent de Paul (September 27)
- ◆ Mother Teresa of Calcutta (September 10)
- ◆ St. Francis of Assisi (October 4)
- ◆ St. Teresa of Avila (October 15)
- ◆ St. Martin de Porres (November 3)
- ◆ St. Francis Xavier Cabrini (November 13)
- ◆ Dorothy Day (November 29)
- ◆ St. Francis Xavier (December 3)
- ◆ Thomas Merton (December 10)

The Proper of Saints in the *Sacramentary* has prayers for the following saints who are described in the Saints Profiles.

January 4 – St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
January 25 – Conversion of St. Paul
January 31 – St. John Bosco
February 10 – St. Scholastica
April 7 – St. John Baptist de la Salle
June 29 – Sts. Peter and Paul
July 11 – St. Benedict
July 31 – Ignatius of Loyola
August 11 – St. Clare
August 14 – St. Maximilian Kolbe
September 27 – St. Vincent de Paul
October 4 – St. Francis of Assisi
October 15 – Teresa of Avila
November 3 – St. Martin de Porres
November 13 – St. Francis Xavier Cabrini
December 3 – St. Francis Xavier

The *Lectionary* contains the readings for the following saints who are described in the Saints Profiles.

January 25 – Conversion of St. Paul
January 31 – St. John Bosco
February 10 – St. Scholastica
April 7 – St. John Baptist de la Salle
June 29 – Sts. Peter and Paul
July 11 – St. Benedict
July 31 – Ignatius of Loyola
August 11 – St. Clare
September 27 – St. Vincent de Paul
October 4 – St. Francis of Assisi
October 15 – Teresa of Avila
November 3 – St. Martin de Porres
December 3 – St. Francis Xavier

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

(1774-1821)

Feast Day: January 4

It is true the Journey is long, the burden is heavy – but the Lord delivers his faithful servants from all their troubles...Is it nothing to sleep serene under his guardian wing – to take to the brightness of the glorious sun with renewed strength and renewed blessings...to be assured that love is enough to tie us faithfully to him.

(Elizabeth Ann Seton)

All her life, Elizabeth Ann Seton loved to conquer challenges. In a way, that was true even after her death. She is the first person to be declared a saint who was born in what would soon become the United States of America.

Elizabeth was born in New York City. Her parents were wealthy and well-educated Episcopalians. They believed in helping the poor, and they taught her to do so from the time she was a small child. She later married a successful businessman and they began a family. Elizabeth still found time to do important volunteer work. She founded the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children.

By the time Elizabeth was 30 years old, her situation had changed completely. Her husband lost his business, grew seriously ill and died. Now she herself was a widow with young children. During her husband's illness, encouragement from Catholic friends had consoled her. She decided to become a Catholic, although in doing so she lost the support of her wealthy family. As a single parent with five children to care for, she had no way to earn a living.

However, soon she was invited to begin a school for young girls from poor families. The school she founded, near Baltimore, Maryland, was the first Catholic school in the United States. With 18 other dedicated women, Elizabeth went on to organize the first group of women religious in the United States, the Sisters of Charity.

Cheerfully, she started from scratch in the work of building Catholic education. That meant not only starting more schools but also training teachers and writing textbooks herself.

Elizabeth Ann Seton accomplished all this in a very short life. She died when she was in her late 40s. The Catholic school system that she founded now thrives all over North America.

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

St. John Bosco

(1815-1888)

Feast Day: January 31

To call others to Christ, John Bosco used everything he could think of, even acrobatic tricks and tightrope walking. His cleverness stood him in good stead. Many young people learned about God because of the care they received from John.

He was born in a small village in the Piedmont region of Italy. His father, a peasant farmer, died when John was only two years old, leaving the family very poor. When young John went away to the seminary at age 18, even the clothes on his back had been donated by people from his village.

John decided that his ministry would be in Turin, the closest city to his village. Turin was becoming an industrial town. Teenage boys would leave their poor families in the countryside and come into town searching for work. In the city these teenagers lived in terrible conditions.

Even before his ordination, John began taking a group of boys out to the country every Sunday for sports, a picnic, song and prayer. No one else cared about them. After John became a priest he housed boys who had nowhere else to live. Then he began programs to train them as shoemakers, tailors and printers. The training protected them from a harsh world they were too young to face.

Many of the boys and young men John assisted were troubled. Often they had experienced abuse or neglect. Somehow John called forth the best in them by affirming them and treating them kindly. This was considered a very unusual approach to teaching. Most teachers in those days thought that children must be forced to learn and punished severely when they didn't.

The number of young people in John's care grew ever larger. He had trouble finding assistants who understood his gentle teaching methods. Eventually he began an order of priests and an order of sisters, the Salesian order. He also started a group of laypeople called Cooperators. All were trained especially for this work. Today these orders serve in schools, colleges, seminaries, hospitals and missions all over the world.

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

St. Scholastica and St. Benedict

(480-550)

Feast Day: St. Scholastic—February 10, St. Benedict—July 11

All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Matthew 25:35). Proper honor must be shown to all, especially to those who are our faith (Galatians 6:10) and to pilgrims. ...Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received...

Then as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with inexpressible delight of love. Never swerving from his instructions....., but faithfully observing his teaching...until death, we shall through patience share in the suffering of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom.

(Benedict)

Fifteen hundred years ago in Italy, the old Roman government was in chaos. The army broke ranks. The police stopped functioning. There was no one to protect people from bandits. Even the roads fell into disrepair, and markets quickly ran out of food. What little food was left in the land was hoarded by the strong. Weak and sick people starved. This kind of selfishness turned neighbors against neighbors and destroyed families.

In these terrible times, a man named Benedict organized a community of men. His sister Scholastica did the same thing for women. Benedict put together a "Rule of Life," a very sensible set of guidelines for helping people get along and work together effectively. Around the year 530, Benedict founded a monastery called Monte Cassino. Everyone in the community lived under one roof. The "Rule of Life" divided the day into times of prayer, study, work and rest. Scholastica settled nearby and formed the first community of women to use Benedict's rule.

The Rule said that greed, grudges, pride, and laziness have no place in a community. Instead, everyone needs to work hard for the sake of one another. Generosity, forgiveness and charity are the only ways to bring order out of chaos. Daily life was organized according to a Latin motto, *ora et labora*, "prayer and work." Benedict taught people a way to use prayer and Christlike attitudes to get over their fear and mistrust of each other.

In these communities, everyone worked and no one kept personal possessions. This helped to prevent envy and pride. Benedict encouraged a spirit of generous forgiveness. This generosity was extended to strangers and the needy. Every visitor to the abbey was treated like Christ. No one was ever turned away. Hospitality is still a trademark of Benedictine communities around the world.

The Benedictines soon numbered hundreds of houses throughout Europe. They did not start out with the intention of preserving and passing on culture, but that is what they did. In establishing their houses, they began to clear forests, reclaim land, and give some system to agriculture. In so doing, they were laying the foundations for economic recovery and stability. In addition, the monks began the process of copying manuscripts so that nothing of the glorious past was lost. The copying of manuscripts grew into a large monastic industry. Much knowledge of the ancient world has survived only through the efforts of these monk copyists. In the natural course of events, the Benedictine monasteries eventually became the inns and hospitals of the time, because they were often the only havens of peace and security in a world of upheaval and war.

Benedict spent his life leading his monks, counseling visitors to the abbey and caring for the sick who lived nearby. Benedictine monks and nuns would later be given credit for preserving European civilization during the Middle Ages. Because of this, Benedict and Scholastic have been named patron saints of Europe.

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).
Take Me Home Too. Peter Mazar. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997).

Saint Katharine Drexel

(1858-1955)

Feast Day: March 3

Resolve: Generously and with no half-hearted, timorous dread of opinions of the Church and men to manifest my mission....You have no time to occupy your thoughts with that complacency or consideration of what others will think. Your business is simply, "What will my Father in heaven think?"
(Katherine Drexel)

Katharine Drexel was from a wealthy and well-known Philadelphia family. Her parents were good to the poor. Her father made large donations to charity and her mother helped poor families to pay their rent every month. As a child, Katharine reflected on this. She wanted to help the poor when she grew up but wasn't sure how to do so.

Katharine and her family traveled all over the United States and Europe. On one unforgettable trip, the Drexels traveled to the state of Washington on a private train. Katharine was shocked by the poverty she saw on Indian reservations there. Later, while visiting Rome, the family spoke with Pope Leo XIII. Katharine begged him to send missionaries to help neglected Native American communities like the ones she had seen. To her shock, he said, "My child, why don't you become a missionary yourself?"

Eventually Katharine Drexel did just that. Then, as always, talented and committed workers were more urgently needed than donations. In 1891, with 13 other women, she founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. They worked to provide for the needy, and over time Katharine donated 12 million dollars of the fortune she had inherited.

Katharine and her sisters first opened a boarding school for Pueblo Indian students in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In time they founded missions for Indians in 16 states. They began a secondary school for African American students in New Orleans. This school was the forerunner of Xavier University. (Other universities in the South were not open to black students in those days because of segregation laws.)

In the years after the First World War, when African American people moved from the South to work in northern cities, the sisters also started schools in Chicago, Boston and New York City.

It would not have been easy to recognize Reverend Mother Katharine as the same person who had once toured the West on a private train. As she traveled across the country spending her fortune on new schools, she tried to live as simply as she could. Her clothing was threadbare. She bought the least expensive railroad tickets and carried her lunch in a brown paper bag.

Katharine Drexel died in 1955 at the age of 96. People of all races from across the United States journeyed to Philadelphia to attend her funeral.

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

Sister Thea Bowman

(1937-1990)

March 30—Anniversary of the Death of Thea Bowman

Maybe I'm not making big changes in the world, but if I have somehow helped or encouraged somebody along the journey then I've done what I'm called to do.

(Thea Bowman)

Thea Bowman was one of the great treasures of the American Catholic church. As a Franciscan Sister, she managed, in her manifold witness to the gospel, to integrate the resources of her Catholic faith with her identity as an African-American woman. Ablaze with the spirit of love, the memory of struggle, and a faith in God's promises, she impressed her many audiences not just with her message but with her nobility of spirit. No one she encountered, whether school children, college students, cynical journalists, or a convention hall of bishops, could fail to catch a measure of her joy and gratitude for the gift of life. She was a particular inspiration to the black Catholic community, helping them to assert their pride of place among the People of God, while also encouraging them to enrich the wider church with the gifts of their distinctive culture and spirituality.

She was born Bertha Bowman in rural Mississippi in 1937. While attending a parochial school she was baptized as a Catholic at the age of ten. The most formative experience of her childhood came when her parents switched her to a new school run by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. There she found her love of learning but also her vocation to become a nun. To her family and friends it was an astonishing decision. Nevertheless, she entered the convent when she was sixteen and took the name Sister Thea ("of God").

As the only black person in a white religious order she tended to stand out. But whatever the expectations of her community, she had no desire to "blend in." She brought with her a strong sense of her identity as a black Catholic woman, and over time she came to believe that this identity entailed a very special vocation. She was committed to asserting a black way of being Catholic. Previously black Catholics were expected to conform to the spirituality of the white Euro-American church. The gospel hymns, the spirituals, the dancing, the testifying in the spirit—all features of the Protestant black churches—were foreign in the Catholic church. But for black Catholics, Sister Thea believed, this accounted for a sense of cultural marginality. Not only should there be room in the Catholic church for the spiritual traditions of African Americans, but their experience had much to contribute to the wider church. Part of this experience was the history of slavery and oppression. But part of it also was a spirituality of survival and resistance reflected in the tradition of the spirituals, the importance of family, community, celebration, and remembrance.

"What does it mean to be black and Catholic?" she asked. "It means that I come to my church fully functioning. I bring myself, my black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to

become. I bring my whole history, my traditions, my experience, my culture, my African-American song and dance and gesture and movement and teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility as gift to the Church.”

After earning a doctorate in English, Thea returned to the South to work with the church in Mississippi and Louisiana. In 1980 she helped to found the Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans. This became the base for her ministry as a speaker and evangelist. Thea was an extraordinary, spellbinding speaker. A combination storyteller, preacher, and performer, she brought to her lectures the atmosphere of a revival meeting. Punctuating her speaking with renditions of the spirituals, she generally had her audiences, black or white, singing along with her before she was finished.

She was invited to speak before hundreds of groups, including the U.S. Catholic bishops at their annual meeting in 1989. In one speech she noted that women were not allowed to preach in the Catholic church. But this shouldn't stop them from preaching everywhere else! “God has called us to speak the word that is Christ, that is truth, that is salvation. And if we speak that word in love and faith, with patience and prayer and perseverance, it will take root. It does have power to save us. Call one another! Testify! Teach! Act on the Word! Witness!”

By this time Sister Thea was compelled to bear witness in a different way. She was diagnosed in 1984 as suffering from breast cancer. Though increasingly ill, Thea continued her extensive travels and speaking, even when she was confined to a wheelchair. With her bright African robes and her now-bald head, she was, as always, a striking figure. But now when she sang the spirituals – “Sometimes I feel like a motherless child / A long way from home” – her audience detected an even more personal and poignant confession of faith.

The faith that had sustained the slaves, the hope expressed in the spirituals, the love embodied by St. Francis, now sustained her in her personal way of the cross. And to her other mighty gifts to the church she now added the witness of her courage and trust in God:

When I first found out I had cancer, I didn't know what to pray for. I didn't know if I should pray for healing or life or death. Then I found peace in praying for what my folks call “God's perfect will.” As it evolved, my prayer has become, “Lord, let me live until I die. By that I mean I want to live, love, and serve fully until death comes. If that prayer is answered... how long really doesn't matter. Whether it's just a few months or a few years is really immaterial.

Asked how she made sense out of her suffering, she answered, “I don't make sense of suffering. I try to make sense of life... I try each day to see God's will... I console myself with the old Negro spiritual: ‘Sooner will be done the troubles of this world. I'm going home to live with God.’”

Sister Thea died on March 30, 1990, at the age of fifty-three.

Source

All Saints – Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time. Robert Ellsberg. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997).

Oscar Arnulfo Romero

(1917-1980)

March 24—Anniversary of the Death of Archbishop Oscar Romero

I rejoice, brothers and sisters, that our church is persecuted precisely for its preferential option for the poor and for seeking to become incarnate in the interests of the poor... Whoever out of love for Christ gives himself to the service of others will live, like the grain of wheat that falls and only apparently dies. If it did not die it would remain alone.... Only in undoing itself does it produce the harvest.

(Oscar Romero)

Oscar Romero was born in a small town in a remote part of El Salvador, which is a tiny country in Central America. Oscar's family was neither rich nor poor. This was unusual in El Salvador, where there was almost no middle-income people. A few rich, powerful people rule the many poor.

Oscar was apprenticed to a carpenter at age 13, but he wanted to be a priest, so a year later he entered the seminary. Oscar was bright, and he was placed in church jobs that would train him to become a bishop. When he was appointed archbishop of San Salvador, he was welcomed by the rich ruling families of the country. Although they were guilty of violence against the poor, they thought Oscar would not make any trouble for them. He was known to be shy and conservative.

But after a short time as bishop, Oscar could no longer overlook the sufferings of the poor. He said, "They are crushed in their homes, taken prisoner, made to disappear. They go to jail, are judged falsely, and no one pays any attention."

He felt called to be the voice of all the people without a voice. During his sermons in church he spoke against political repression. These sermons were broadcast on radio and thousands of people listened. "Be a patriot; kill a priest." In the troubled Latin American country of El Salvador, handbills bearing this violent slogan were once seen everywhere. In spite of the danger, Archbishop Oscar Romero kept speaking out for justice. His boldness eventually cost him his life.

Some Salvadoran priests and other church workers were being called traitors for defending the rights of the poor. Some had already been murdered. After three years of constant threats to his life, Oscar was shot to death while celebrating Mass at a hospital chapel. His assassination shocked the world.

The violence in El Salvador was only beginning. Bomb blasts and rifle shots exploded into the huge crowds attending his funeral, killing 40 more people. During the 1980s, many thousands died violently. The people of El Salvador know that their bishop died for the sake of his flock. To this day, they treasure his memory.

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

St. John Baptist de La Salle

(1651-1719)

Feast Day: April 7

Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ in the work that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself. He wants your disciples to see him in you and receive your teaching as if he were teaching them. They must be convinced that the truth of Jesus Christ comes from your mouth, that it is only in his name that you teach, that he has given you authority over them.

Have you....charity and tenderness towards the poor children whom you have to instruct? Do you avail yourself of the affection the children have for you to attract them to God? If you show the firmness of a faith in withdrawing them from evil, you should also show the tenderness of a mother in gathering them together, and in doing them all the good in your power.

(John Baptist de La Salle)

In the days of King Louis XIV of France, the country had only two classes of people; the very poor and the very rich. In time, these unjust conditions would lead to the French Revolution. But John Baptist de la Salle did something revolutionary of his own. Born to a rich and well-known family, he spent his life teaching the poor.

John was born in the city of Rheims. As a youth he was intelligent, handsome and a smooth talker. He became a priest and studied to receive a doctorate in theology. With so much education, he expected to hold a powerful position in the church.

John's ambitions took an unexpected turn in Rheims. There he met Adrian Nyel. In those days, only the rich could afford to send their children to school. Adrian had a dream of educating poor children, and he wanted John to help him. John did not enjoy going into the slums, but Adrian convinced him to help begin a school for poor boys. John began training teachers. He taught them how to plan lessons and keep order in classrooms.

Soon his community of teachers became the "Brothers of the Christian Schools." They were the first religious group whose special mission was to teach the poor. The brothers taught their students how to live in the world as Christians.

Back in those days, classes were taught in Latin. If you did not understand Latin, you could not learn. The brothers began to teach in French so ordinary students could understand. John realized that this work was a call from God. He resigned from his post at the cathedral and gave away his share of the family fortune to the victims of a famine.

In the 1600s, only the rich could afford to educate their children. What de La Salle wanted to do – teach poor children – was revolutionary. His belief was that if poor children were given a

practical education, they could better support themselves and their families and climb out of the poverty that spawned so much crime and despair. While receiving an education, the children could also learn religion.

To reach poor children, de La Salle developed much of the approach that has since become standard in schools worldwide. At this time students were taught, for the most part, one at a time by tutors; this was practical only for the rich and the few. To accommodate the large number of poor children, de La Salle created classrooms with rows of students. A fixed daily schedule of a variety of courses was required in his schools, and all subjects were taught in the language of the students. de La Salle also created commercial or business courses, which had not been offered before. de La Salle opened the first teachers' college, and industrial schools for boys. Today, de La Salle is considered one of the founders of modern education. He is a patron saint of teachers.

Sources

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).
A Popular History of the Catholic Church. Carl Koch. (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1997).

Blessed Damien of Molokai

(1840-1899)

Feast Day: April 15

*"I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all for Christ."
(Blessed Damien)*

Damien De Veuster, a young Belgian priest, has served nine years as a missionary in the Hawaiian Islands when he felt called to request a perilous assignment. He asked his superiors to be allowed to serve on the island of Molokai, the notorious leper colony.

Westerners had arrived in the Hawaiian Islands only late in the eighteenth century, finding a native population of about three hundred thousand. Within a hundred years the ravages of disease had reduced this number to fifty thousand. Among many illnesses, the most dreaded scourge was leprosy. The first case appeared only in 1840, but within thirty years it had reached epidemic proportions. Helpless to control its spread and unable at that time to offer any remedy, the authorities responded in 1868 by establishing a leper settlement on the remote and inaccessible island of Molokai. By law, Hawaiians found to be suffering from the disease were snatched by force from their families and communities and sent to this island exile to perish.

Conditions on the island were horrific. Patients were literally dumped in the surf and left to make their way ashore, seek shelter in caves or squalid shacks, and cling to life as best they could, beyond the pale of any civil or moral law.

It was to this island that Father Damien was assigned. From the beginning he sought to instill in the members of his "parish" a sense of self-worth and dignity. His first task was to restore dignity to death. Where previously the deceased were tossed into shallow graves to be consumed by pigs and dogs, he designed a clean and fenced-in cemetery and established a proper burial society. He constructed a church and worked alongside the people building clean new houses. Within several years of his arrival the island was utterly transformed; no longer a way-station to death, it had become a proud and joyful community.

As part of his effort to uplift the self-esteem of his flock, Damien realized from the beginning that he must not shrink from contact with the people. Despite the horrid physical effects of the disease, he insisted on intimate contact with them. When he preached, he made a habit of referring to his flock not as "my brothers and sisters," but as "we lepers."

One day this reference assumed a new meaning, as Damien recognized in himself the unmistakable symptoms of the disease. Now he was truly one with the suffering of his people, literally confined, as they were to the island of Molokai. Despite the advancing illness, which eventually ravaged his body, he redoubled his efforts, working tirelessly in his building projects and his pastoral responsibilities.

In his last years he suffered terrible bouts of loneliness, feeling keenly the lack of a religious community of support, and even the opportunity to receive absolution. On one occasion a visiting bishop refused to disembark from his ship. Damien rowed out to meet him and suffered the humiliation of shouting up his confession. Because of fear of contagion he was even forbidden to visit the mission headquarters of his order in Honolulu.

Damien died of leprosy on April 15, 1889. By that time his fame had spread widely throughout the world. He was beatified in 1995 by Pope John Paul II.

Source

All Saints – Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time. Robert Ellsberg. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997).

St. Joan of Arc

(1412-1431)

Feast Day: May 30

“On being asked whether she did not believe that she was subject to the church which is on earth, namely, our Holy Father the Pope, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and prelates of the church, she replied: Yes, but our Lord must be served first.”

When Joan of Arc was born, the French and the English had been fighting for almost 100 years, and the English were winning.

Joan’s family were French farmers. As a girl, she helped to spin wool and tend sheep. Because there was no school in her village, she never learned to read and write.

At about the age of 12, Joan began to hear the voices of saints. They told her things she could hardly believe. They said she would save France. Joan had no idea how to do the things the voices were telling her.

At about age 17, Joan persuaded the captain of a French fort to take her to Charles. Charles was the son of the dead king of France, but he was afraid to claim his crown. She convinced him to let her fight for his cause. Soon she rallied the French troops at the city of Orleans, which was under attack. She led the troops to free the city.

No one had ever heard of anything like this before – here was a young girl leading armies! Under her leadership, the French army defeated the English in four other battles. Six months later the English withdrew. With Joan’s encouragement, Charles was crowned king of France.

About a year later Joan was captured by the English. They threw her into prison and tried her for witchcraft. Then they burned her at the stake in the marketplace of Rouen. When she died she was not yet 20 years old.

An illiterate peasant girl, a shepherd, a “nobody,” she heeded a religious call to save her country when all the “somebodies” of her time proved unable or unwilling to meet the challenge. She stood up before princes of the church and state and the most learned authorities of her world and refused to compromise her conscience or deny her special vocation. She paid the ultimate price for her stand. And in doing so she won a prize far more valuable than the gratitude of the king or the keys of Orleans.

Source

All Saints – Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time. Robert Ellsberg. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997).

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

Pope John XXIII

(1881-1963)

Anniversary of the Death of Pope John XXIII: June 3

"Now more than ever, certainly more than in past centuries, our intention is to serve people as such and not only Catholics; to defend above all and everywhere the rights of the human person and not only those of the Catholic Church; it is not the Gospel that changes; it is we who begin to understand it better....The moment has arrived when we must recognize the signs of the times, seize the opportunity, and look far abroad."

(Pope John XXIII)

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was one of ten children of a peasant farmer near Bergamo in Italy. The family was poor. He would walk to school barefoot and carry his shoes so he wouldn't wear out the leather.

Early in his priestly career, in 1905, Roncalli received one of the most impacting assignments of his life. He was appointed to be the secretary of the then new bishop of Bergamo, Radini-Tedeschi. The bishop was a cosmopolitan, a visionary, a hard, hard worker, and, most of all, a man of the people. Roncalli was a bright but essentially simple peasant boy. For the first decade of his priestly life, Rodini showed him the world and its poor. Most of all, he showed him that the Church was called to live out the Gospel in the world. Roncalli worked with Bishop Radini-Tedeschi on the reorganization of the diocese, an experience that would be very important when he became a bishop and then pope.

After serving a term as a medical chaplain during World War I, he was assigned to the church diplomatic corps. His army experience taught him about the horrors of war, turning him against war forever. His diplomatic missions sent him to countries where there was misunderstanding between Orthodox and Catholic Christians. This world filled him with the hope that someday the churches might be reunited.

In 1953, at age seventy-two, Roncalli was named a cardinal and became the bishop of Venice. He enjoyed his role as the city's pastor and expected to remain there his whole life. Vigorously, he set about creating and implementing a pastoral plan for his archdiocese, much in the manner of his early tutor, Bishop Radini-Tedeschi.

Five years later, Pope Pius XII died. When Cardinal Roncalli arrived in Rome in October 1958, his seventy-seventh year, to participate in electing Pius XII's successor, he brought years of administrative, diplomatic, and ecumenical experience. He also bore a great love of people and a vision of what the Church needed. On the third day of the conclave, two cardinals went to his room and told him they were convinced he was about to be elected. He was probably elected because he was nearly 78 years old and was not expected to make sweeping changes. But if a quiet, conservative pope was what some of the cardinals had in mind when they cast their votes, they were about to be surprised.

Pope John looked at his world and wondered about the role of the Church. "Is my Church a seed or pearl? Is it only the pearl of great price to be preserved from all possible contamination? Is the Church also the seed that must burrow into the earth of the poor and bring them new

hope? Should it not penetrate the soil of the rich and the mighty that their consciences might be touched by the gospel of Christ?"

Pope John had heard critics complain that the Church was irrelevant, that its pageantry and preoccupation with past glories obscured the message of Jesus. They claimed that people had stopped turning to the Church for meaning. Instead of saving humanity the Church seemed intent on saving itself.

Pope John somewhat agreed with this criticism. "Of course the gospel is precious. But if it is not allowed to take root in the lives of men (and women), it will not be believed. If it is too protected, it will become like a museum piece – admired by tourists who give it a hasty glance. Men (and women) are saved by the living word of God, not by a lifeless trophy."

Pope John decided that the Church as God's seed must be generously poured forth in the world. He would call a council to bring this about. On January 25, 1959, 100 days after his election, John XXIII announced his plans to hold an ecumenical council. The Second Vatican Council opened on October 11, 1962, amid the pageantry and splendor of St. Peter's Basilica, as it played host to the Church's leadership gathered from every corner of the world. That evening, nearly a half million people poured into St. Peter's Square for a torchlight demonstration. Pope John was overwhelmed.

Pope John set as the Council's immediate task the renewal of the religious life of Catholics, the updating of the Church's teaching and organization. Its ultimate goal was the unity of all Christians. The Second Vatican Council launched a wide range of changes in the Catholic Church. It proclaimed that the Church was the entire community of believers, the Body of Christ, the People of God. The Church was not only the pope, bishops, and priests – it was the entire community of faith. It revised the Mass, including changing the language from Latin to the language of the people. It updated the celebration (ritual) of all the sacraments. It called lay people to take an active role as leaders in the Church and to live their faith in the world. It emphasized the role of the Church in the world – working for justice, peace, and human dignity for all people.

The old-man, the so-called transitional pope, undertook the breathtaking challenge of changing the course of history in the Catholic Church. Few people expected a seventy-seven-year-old man to be such an ambitious changer of Church history. Pope John served as pope for only five years before he died of cancer. But in that time he accomplished much. He gathered the Second Vatican Council to examine the church's role in modern life. He reached out to the leaders of other Christian churches and called for reconciliation. He spoke boldly against the arms race and challenged the superpowers of the world to give up their stockpiles of nuclear weapons.

Amid this hectic schedule, John found time to pay surprise visits to hospitals, orphanages and jails around the city of Rome. He enjoyed talking with people so much that he often took walks through Rome disguised in a priest's cassock. He was much loved. When he died, the whole world grieved.

Sources

The Story of the Church – Peak Moments from Pentecost to the Year 2000. Alfred McBride, O.Praem. (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1996).

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

St. Peter

(First Century)

Feast Day: June 29

You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

All four Gospels agree on the preeminence of St. Peter among the original twelve apostles. A Galilean fisherman and the brother of Andrew, Peter was in fact one of the first apostles to be called by Christ, and he is cited as a witness to many of the most significant events in the gospel story.

Though Peter was originally named Simon it seems that Jesus gave him an Aramaic name, Cephas, which was the meaning of "Rock." From its Greek form it is rendered Peter. This provided Jesus with a memorable pun when he addressed the disciple with the fateful words "You are Peter, and upon this *rock* I will build my church." Upon this text the Catholic church has built a formidable claim for the primacy of the pope as successor to Peter. For understandable reasons, the church draws less attention to the subsequent verse, also addressed by Jesus to the first people: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block; for you are not on the side of God, but of men."

Both declarations reflect the complex characterization of Peter as a man torn between his better and his weaker qualities. As a leader and a spokesperson for the Twelve, he is in many ways not only the preeminent but the paradigmatic disciple. And yet Peter is far from an idealized figure; the Gospels go to great lengths to stress his weakness, fear, and failures. What distinguishes him from his companions is not his infallible judgment but his articulation of their common faith—"You are the Christ"—and his zealous determination, after repeatedly falling, to get back up and rejoin the struggle.

Apart from Jesus himself, Peter is surely the most fully articulated character in the New Testament. His appearances in the Gospels consistently highlight the competing elements of his personality: a bold impetuosity, a tendency to act or speak first and think later, accompanied by a capacity for fear, doubt, and childlike meekness.

As a spokesman for the disciples Peter had his good days. But it was also Peter who was so fearful upon witnessing the transfiguration that he babbled on about building tents for Moses and Elijah. He asked whether we should forgive as many as seven times seven; he tried to walk on water, but lost faith and almost drowned. He won full marks after Jesus asked them, "Who do you say I am?" and he answered, "You are the Christ." This was one of his grandest moments. But he instantly failed the test and earned a stinging rebuke when he disputed Christ's words about his coming passion and exclaimed, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

At the Last Supper Peter made a bold claim: “Even though they all fall away, I will not.” But then before the night was over he had denied his master three times. None of the subsequent sins of the church can be any more scandalous than that betrayal. Yet Peter was also the one who spoke for the disciples when Jesus asked if they too planned to desert him: “Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life and we believe.” He wept after his betrayal of Jesus, and when on Easter morning he heard that the Lord was risen he ran to the tomb to see for himself. And on this “rock” the church was founded. What could this mean but that if the gospel was to be carried forward in time it would be upon the foundation of faith and grace and not by the natural strength, wisdom, or virtue of any ecclesiastical authority.

John’s Gospel ends on a touching note that defines the “petrine” ministry in memorable terms. It is not a matter of preeminence in authority or power. What Jesus seeks is preeminence in love, expressed in service and self-sacrifice. Three times – echoing Peter’s triple denial – the risen Christ asks him: “Do you love me?” Each time, when Peter answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you,” Jesus commands him, “Feed my sheep.” Finally, he says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go.”

According to the book of Acts, Peter continued to serve as a leader of the early church in Jerusalem. He preached the first sermon after Pentecost, performed the first healing, and authorized the extension of the Christian mission unto the gentiles (though he would be publicly rebuked by Paul for vacillating on this crucial policy). More than once he would be arrested and imprisoned, only to be delivered by miraculous means. After the final incident we are simply told that “he departed and went to another place.” He is mentioned no more.

According to ancient tradition Peter became the first bishop of Rome and was there martyred during the reign of Nero (c. 54-68). Eusebius, on the authority of Origen, records that Peter was crucified. He notes, furthermore, that Peter – believing himself unworthy of emulating his master – requested to be hung upside down.

Source

All Saints – Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time. Robert Ellsberg. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997).

St. Paul

(First Century)

Feast Day: January 25 (Conversion of St. Paul) and June 29

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

According to Kierkegaard, there are only two appropriate responses to Christ: either scandal or discipleship. For Saul (or Paul as he came to be known), a devout Jew of Tarsus, the terms of this dilemma were perfectly obvious. Either the claims of Jesus' disciples were true or they constituted blasphemy. If the latter, then his movement should be suppressed with all the force of the law. But if they were true, then one had no choice but to give up everything and follow him. Paul was no believer in half-measures.

His first appearance in the Acts of the Apostles finds him on the edge of a crowd that is stoning St. Stephen to death. In the heart of their exertion the murderous mob had laid their garments at Saul's feet. Luke notes that "Saul was consenting" to the deed. In the next verse he is no longer a passive witness but a zealous leader in the persecution of the church, even traversing the countryside in search of Christians to denounce.

It was on such an errand to Damascus that his life was suddenly changed. It came about with a flash of light that threw him to the ground and a voice that cried, "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" When he asked for the identity of the voice he heard, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Now convinced that Jesus was indeed the Christ, Saul asked to be baptized and went on to devote the remainder of this life to the service of the gospel.

Saul made his way to Jerusalem and met the original disciples. With some difficulty he overcame their doubts and was eventually commissioned to join Barnabas in serving the Christian community in Antioch. The local church there, in turn, commissioned the two to undertake the first of many missionary journeys. Henceforth Saul would become completely identified with his service as a missionary. His strategy was first to approach the local synagogue. Frequently this provoked violent persecution. As a result, he found himself turning instead – and with considerable success – to a receptive gentile audience. Appropriate to his new mission, he now preferred to go by a new name: Paul.

At a council in Jerusalem around 50 Paul and Barnabas – with the support of Peter – successfully argued the case for the mission to the gentiles, arguing furthermore that gentile converts need not first be circumcised as Jews. Paul worked out a profound theological rationale for this decision. He argued that by his death and resurrection Jesus had substituted faith in place of obedience to the law as the sole condition for salvation. This position would become the cornerstone of the Christian church as it quickly took on the character of a predominantly gentile religion.

Paul's journeys took him through much of the Mediterranean world. In many towns he was responsible for implanting the seeds of the gospel, and toward these communities he felt special pride and responsibility. As often, however, he met with bitter opposition. He was frequently beaten, stoned, and imprisoned. He endured shipwreck, hunger, and humiliation. But he was sustained by a sense of the invincible power of the Risen Christ: "If God is for us, who is against us?"

In his letters to the Christian communities he reflected at length on the "folly" of Christ who proved victorious by means of failure on the cross. "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are."

When Paul was arrested by the Roman authorities in Jerusalem he claimed the privilege of a Roman citizen and was transported to Rome for trial. Along the way he continued to write to the communities, exhorting them to courage, faith, and love toward one another. As he anticipated his fate in Rome, he felt satisfied with his life: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

According to early church tradition Paul was beheaded in Rome under the emperor Nero in the year 64. His letters, which continued to circulate, became foundational documents for the early church. The example of his courageous witness underscored the credibility of his faith:

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Source

All Saints – Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time. Robert Ellsberg. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997).

(Read the story of St. Paul's conversion in the Acts of the Apostles. Read Acts 9:1-30 for the story and Acts 22:6-11 for Paul's retelling of the experience.)

St. Ignatius of Loyola

(1491-1556)

Feast Day: July 31

"Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. All is yours. Dispose of it wholly according to your will. Give me your love and your grace.

That is enough for me.

(Ignatius of Loyola)

Ignatius was born in the Basque region of Spain. As a boy he had little interest in schooling. He wanted only to be a military officer like his father and grandfather. In 1521, when he was 30 years old, he reached a turning point in his life. While defending the Spanish castle of Pamplona against a French siege, he was struck by a cannonball. Both of his legs were injured.

Knowing he would be unable to move around for a long time, Ignatius asked for some entertaining novels about knights and soldiers. But all that could be found for him were books about Christ and the lives of the saints. In reading them, he began to believe that the saints showed greater courage than soldiers.

The next year, when Ignatius had recovered, he revisited a nearby shrine. He hung his sword before a statue of Mary, gave away his uniform to a beggar, and promised to dedicate his life to God's service. The former warrior went to school with children for the next two years until he was ready to enter a university.

At the University of Paris, Ignatius was still much older than his classmates. But he met six talented young men who wanted to share his new life of prayer and service. They studied theology, served the poor and gathered often for prayer. To help them, Ignatius wrote his *Spiritual Exercises*, a guidebook for closer union with God, which is still in wide use today. They learned to do all, as Ignatius said, "for the greater glory of God."

Ignatius hoped that these young people would become a kind of army of God's servants. He challenged them to live as the poorest of the poor, teaching children and uneducated adults, working in hospitals and prisons.

As more and more people came to share in this vision, Ignatius showed a gift for organization. He combined this talent with his love of deep prayer. By the time he died, over a thousand people had committed their lives to this new kind of service. They were called the Society of Jesus, or the "Jesuits" for short. Some of them became missionaries. Others began schools.

In inspiring others to work for God all over the world, Ignatius' own youthful love for adventure was satisfied. Today he is considered the patron saint of the Basque people.

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

St. Clare of Assisi

(1193-1253)

Feast Day: August 11

Place your mind before the mirror of eternity! Place your soul in the brilliance of glory! Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance! And transform your entire 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 that God...has reserved from the beginning for those who love...

(Clare of Assisi)

It was Palm Sunday in Assisi in Italy. Clare, a beautiful young woman of 18, silently slipped out of her father's palace in the dead of night the only way she would avoid being seen – through a door usually reserved for dead bodies. In a tiny chapel nearby, she met her friend and spiritual guide, Francis. She replaced her jewels and rich clothes with a dress of rough, grey sackcloth tied with a rope. She was determined to trade her old life for a future with "Lady Poverty." As it turned out, that poverty brought her a lifelong friendship with Francis – and with Christ as well.

Clare made this decision after hearing Francis preach and spending time in prayer with him. Like her, he had been born into a wealthy family. But he had given away all he had. Clare was expected to marry someone of noble birth. When her father heard about her plan to live like Francis, he came with his male relatives to the convent where she was staying. He tried to take her back by force, but when he saw her determination to stay he gave in to her wishes.

Soon Clare's sisters and other young women of Assisi came to join her. They called themselves the Poor Ladies. Francis found a simple house for them next to the chapel of San Damiano on the outskirts of town. They chose Clare to be their abbess.

Clare took an unusual approach to being the head of the convent. She thought of herself as the servant of the other women. She waited on them at meals. When they came in from outside, she knelt joyfully to wash their dirty feet. When they got sick, it was Clare who gently tended to them.

Though she never left her convent, her spirit was soon felt all over Europe. Among the women who flocked to join the Poor Ladies were princesses and other nobles. Like Clare, they have lived with wealth and power. They knew these things didn't bring joy.

After Francis' death, Clare lived nearly 30 years longer. Many people thought the Poor Ladies should have farms and vineyards, as other convents had. Three popes tried to give Clare property. Always, though, she won them over to her belief that the Sisters should own nothing. This was Clare's way of protecting the spirit of Francis. In a time when the church and the town of Assisi were wealthy, her choice was a challenge and an example to others. Clare died on the feast of St. Lawrence. Her order still exists. Now they are called Poor Clares.

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

St. Maximilian Kolbe

(1894-1941)

Feast Day: August 14

To combat evil...is to fight with love for all...including those who are less good. It is to put goodness in relief, so as to make it more attractive...When the occasion presents itself to call the attention of society, or of authority, to some evil, it must be done with love for the person to blame.

These Nazis will not kill our souls, since we prisoners certainly distinguish ourselves quite definitely from our tormentors; they will not be able to deprive us of the dignity of our Catholic belief. We will not give up. And when we die, then we die pure and peaceful, resigned to God in our hearts.

(Maximilian Kolbe)

In the Nazi concentration camp called Auschwitz, Maximilian Kolbe was known by the number tattooed on his arm—16670. During the Second World War, more than four million people died at this camp. Before they were killed, they were stripped of everything they owned, including their names.

Maximilian Kolbe was born near Lodz, Poland. He became a Franciscan priest. He decided that printing religious magazines and newspapers was a good way to spread God's word.

On September 1, 1939, Nazi Germany conquered Poland. The city of Warsaw was packed with refugees. Most of them were Jews, afraid for their lives because they were the targets of Nazi hatred. The friars in Warsaw were able to assist about 3000 of the escaping people with food and other supplies.

Maximilian managed to print and distribute and issue of his magazine *The Knight* that spoke out against the war. Soon afterward, the German secret police came for him. He was taken on a cattle truck to the Auschwitz labor camp, where so many others also would be sent before the war was over.

For prisoners, a dreaded event in the camp was the escape of a fellow inmate. When this happened, ten other prisoners were selected at random to die as punishment. One day during the summer of 1941, a prisoner disappeared. (The guards assumed he had escaped, but later he was found dead on the prison grounds.) One of the ten men chosen to be killed cried out in despair, "I'll never see my wife and children again!"

Maximilian stepped forward and asked to take the condemned man's place. His request was granted. He was herded into an underground cell with the other nine men to be starved to death. Over the next two weeks, all except three of them died. Those remaining, including Maximilian, were killed on August 14, the day before Assumption Day.

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

(1910-1997)

September 10—Calling of Mother Teresa to work with the poor

To show great love for God and our neighbor we need not do great things. It is how much love we put in the doing that makes our offering something beautiful for God.

(Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

Our aim is to quench the infinite thirst of Jesus Christ on the Cross for the love of souls.

We serve Jesus in the poor, we nurse him, feed him, clothe him, visit him.

(Constitution of the Missionaries of Charity)

Mother Teresa defines “least of my brethren” as the hungry and the lonely, not only for food but for the Word of God; the thirsty and ignorant, not only for water, but also for knowledge, peace, truth, justice, and love; the naked and unloved, not only for clothes but also for human dignity; the unwanted, the unborn child; the racially discriminated against; the homeless and abandoned, not only for a shelter made of bricks, but for a heart that understands, that covers, that loves; the sick, the dying destitutes, and the captives, not only in body but also in mind and spirit; all those who have lost all hope and faith in life, the alcoholics and drug addicts and all those who have lost God and who have lost all hope in the power of the Spirit.”

On September 10, 1946, the woman who would become Mother Teresa was traveling on a train to Darjeeling, a hill station in the Himalayas. At the time she was simply Sister Agnes, a thirty-six-year-old Loreto Sister of Albanian extraction, who had spent the past twenty years teaching in her order's schools in India. Though she was a devoted nun, beloved by her mostly middle-class students, there was nothing to suggest that she would one day be regarded as one of the most compelling Christian witnesses of the twentieth century. But on this day she received “a call within a call.” God, she suddenly felt, wanted something more from her: “He wanted me to be poor with the poor and to love him in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor.”

So, with the permission of her congregation, she left her convent. In place of her traditional religious habit she donned a simple white sari with a blue border and went out to seek Jesus in the desperate byways of Calcutta. Eventually she was joined by others—including many of her former students. They became the Missionaries of Charity, and she became Mother Teresa.

With time Mother Teresa would establish centers of service around the globe for the sick, the homeless, the unwanted. But she was particularly identified with her home for the dying in Calcutta. There, destitute and dying men and women, gathered off the streets of the city, were welcomed to receive loving care and respect until they died. Those who had lived like “animals in the gutter” were enabled, in Mother Teresa's home, to “die like angels” — knowing that they were truly valued and loved as precious children of God.

It was not Mother Teresa's way to change social structures. "We are not social workers," she said, but "contemplatives in the heart of the world. For we are touching the body of Christ twenty-four hours a day." It was this mystical insight, which she obviously lived, that made Mother Teresa such a widely inspiring figure. She did not simply practice charity; she embodied it.

God has identified himself with the hungry, the sick, the naked, the homeless; hunger, not only for bread, but for love, for care, to be somebody to someone; nakedness, not of clothing only, but nakedness of that compassion that very few people give to the unknown; homelessness, not only just for a shelter made of stone, but that homelessness that comes from having no one to call your own.

For many years Mother Teresa toiled in obscurity. But eventually she was "discovered" by the world. She became the subject of documentary films and biographies; she received honorary degrees from prestigious universities and countless honors, including the Nobel Peace Prize for 1979. Widely regarded as a "living saint," she nevertheless remained remarkably unburdened by such adulation. Nor did she have any exalted sense of her own vocation. "We can do no great things," she said, "Only small things with great love." Often when people begged to join her in her "wonderful work" in Calcutta she would respond gently but firmly: "Find your own Calcutta!" As she explained,

Don't search for God in far lands – he is not there. He is close to you, he is with you. Just keep the lamp burning and you will always see him. Watch and pray. Keep kindling the lamp and you will see his love and you will see how sweet is the Lord you love.

In later life Mother Teresa traveled widely around the world. In the affluent West she had no trouble finding poverty – both the material kind and a no less destructive impoverishment of the spirit. The answer in both cases was love, a love that would begin with persons and ultimately transform the world. But before we tried to love the entire world, we should start by trying to love one other person – someone apparently unlovable, unwanted, or rejected. "You can save only one at a time. We can love only one at a time." That, she believed, is what we were put on earth to do. "Something beautiful for God."

Source

All Saints – Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time. Robert Ellsberg. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997).

St. Hildegard of Bingen

(1098-1179)

Feast Day: September 17

The brightness of God shines in the good works of just people, so that God can be known, adored, and worshipped so lovingly on earth, and so that the virtues of these people can embellish the holy city with their decorations. For by doing good works with the help of God, people worship God with their countless and wonderful actions.

(Hildegard of Bingen)

Hildegard of Bingen served as the conscience of the church in the twelfth century. Not only that – she was also a physician, writer, poet, preacher, musician and playwright.

Hildegard was born to noble parents in a village near Bingen in the Rhine River valley in Germany. The tenth child in her family, she seemed odd to her parents because at the age of five she began to have religious visions. They sent her to live with a spiritual director named Jutta.

Over time, other young women came to join them and an abbey was built for them. They adapted the Rule of St. Benedict. When Jutta died, Hildegard was elected abbess. She was about 38 years old, and she would serve in that role for the rest of her life.

Hildegard was blessed with a deep understanding of God and creation. In spite of Hildegard's humility, her wisdom and goodness were becoming known. Many gifted young women came to join the abbey, which provided a haven for people in many ways. Most came to work and pray. Other people also came for medical care. Poor elderly women who had nowhere else to go were welcomed in as permanent guests.

People poor and rich, anonymous and famous, came for guidance from Hildegard. When larger quarters were needed, she decided to build a new abbey at Bingen. In time another new abbey would be built nearby. It is still in existence and is now called the Convent of St. Hildegard.

When the abbeys seemed well-organized, Hildegard began the first of four preaching journeys she would take during her life. These duties took her to many towns in Germany and into France as well. She was into her 70s by the time the last of these journeys took place.

In many ways Hildegard seems to be a saint for our time. She spoke of her concern for the environment, saying, "All nature is at the disposal of humankind, but we are to work with it because without it we cannot survive."

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

St. Vincent de Paul

(1580-1660)

Feast Day: September 27

Let us go then, my brothers, and work with a new love in the service of the poor, looking even for the most destitute and abandoned among them. Let us recognize that before God they are our lords and masters and we are unworthy to render them our small services.

Let us love God, my brothers, let us love God. But let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brow. ...We must pass, my sisters, from affective love to effective love. And that is a love which takes flesh in works of charity, service of the poor which is undertaken with joy, constancy and tender love.

(Vincent de Paul)

The parents of Vincent de Paul were peasant farmers in the village of Pouy, in France. They worked very hard to keep their six children fed. Because they knew Vincent was bright, they made sacrifices so that he could be educated.

Vincent was determined to use his intelligence and charm to earn a good living for himself. But he found a spiritual director who opened his heart to a concern for others. He began to develop a spirit of compassion. At that time, ordinary people lived in misery, disease and violence. Rich people were completely unaware of the suffering that surrounded them.

Vincent began to work in a small country church where he organized members of the parish to provide food and clothing for the poor. It was the first of many such organizations, which today are called St. Vincent de Paul societies. Vincent came to realize that country people also needed spiritual care. He organized an order of priests that would be trained to go out to the villages and work with peasants. The order came to be called the Vincentians, and it was soon at work all over France. Many of the priests who volunteered gave up promising careers for this humble work.

Vincent established homes for orphans, for physically handicapped persons, and for the elderly. He believed that the rich and noble had a need to share their wealth and to give service, and he boldly reminded them to do so.

Together with Louise de Marillac, Vincent founded the Ladies of Charity, groups of laywomen who volunteered to feed the hungry and care for the sick. Louise de Marillac realized that service to poor people was essential to the Church's mission. Knowing that volunteers like the Ladies of Charity needed support from full-time sisters, she took several women into her home, formed a community and established the religious order called the Daughters of Charity. Soon the Daughters of Charity ran hospitals, hospices, orphanages, and schools.

Sources

A Popular History of the Catholic Church. Carl Koch. (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1997).

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

St. Francis

(c. 1181-1226)

Feast Day: October 4

*Lord make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon,
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is darkness, light,
Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may seek,
not so much to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved, as to love,
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.*
(Prayer of St. Francis)

The world of the twelfth century was not an easy time to be alive. War had become a way of life. The growth of large cities brought many poor and hungry people together in terrible living conditions without jobs. This is the world in which Giovanni Francesco Bernardone lived. He was the son of a wealthy merchant, an enthusiastic party-goer, and a rebel. As a teenager, Francis sold cloth in his father's shop. He was very good at charming the customers. At night he went to parties with the young nobles of the town. He loved fine clothes and everything else that went with being rich. He wasn't much of a student, but he loved the tales of King Arthur and his knights in armor.

Francis wanted to be a knight himself. When the town of Assisi went to war with Perugia (a neighboring town), Francis joined the campaign. A year as a prisoner of war changed his outlook. When he came home he was ill for months. He was confused because everything that had given him joy now seemed empty. Francis spent hours praying for guidance in San Damiano, an old, rundown chapel on the outskirts of town. One day guidance was provided. "Repair my house," said the voice of Christ, "which, as you see, is falling into ruin."

He carried bricks on his back to the chapel and began to repair its stonework. Only much later did Francis realize that the house that God was talking about was not the small chapel but the entire church.

The church of Francis' day was wealthy and powerful, and most people did not have the courage to take the words of the gospels literally. But Francis followed Christ's example. He

became the “Poverello” – the “little poor one.” He decided to live as a poor man and to take care of people who were sick or in need. Francis’ wealthy father angrily disapproved of such a life for his son, but Francis was unswerving in his decision and even publicly discarded the clothes on his back as a sign of putting off his old life. Thus he began his life of proclaiming the love of God, repairing run down churches, and serving those who were lame, blind, poor, or afflicted with leprosy. He acted as a peacemaker between warring towns.

Soon others began to join Francis, earning their bread by working in the fields or by doing odd jobs. Francis developed a simple rule of life for his followers, who became known as Franciscans. Men were not the only ones attracted to Francis’s life and Gospel witness. Clare, a rich young woman of Assisi, asked to join him. She was an intelligent, educated, and pious young woman. She, too, left her wealthy family behind to follow the simple lifestyle of Francis, serving the poor and living without material possessions. Clare founded a religious community of women, known as the Poor Clares.

Through their way of life Francis and Clare taught people the essentials of the Gospels. They worked for peace among all people; they demonstrated a concern for the poor and those in need; and they were a sign that it is possible to be happy without material things.

Francis had an understanding of the unity of all creation that was way ahead of its time. He addressed every created thing as Brother or Sister and treated everything with reverence. He allowed the beauty of creation to fill him with joy.

Francis became ill and died when he was only about 45 years old. On his deathbed he composed the Canticle of the Sun, a hymn of praise still sung to this day. Then he asked to be laid on Brother Earth naked so that he could welcome Sister Death as simply as possible. The pope who canonized him two years later described him as “the most perfect image of Christ.” His body rests in the basilica that was built at Assisi after his death.

Francis of Assisi is a patron saint of Italy. In 1979 he was also named patron saint of ecologists and all people who work to protect the environment.

Sources

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).
A Passion for Life. Joan Chittister. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996)

St. Teresa of Avila

(1515-1582)

Feast Day: October 15

*Let nothing disturb you, nothing dismay you. All things are passing, God never changes.
Patient endurance attains all things....God alone suffices.*

*Whoever has not begun the practice of prayer, I beg for the love of the Lord not to go
without so great a good.... If one perseveres, I trust then in the mercy of God, who never
fails to repay anyone who has taken Him for a friend. For mental prayer in my opinion is
nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to
be alone with Him who we know loves us.*

(Teresa of Avila)

Teresa was a constant amazement to the other people in her convent in the city of Avila in Spain. She was a mystic, a person with a gift for deep prayer. According to stories told about her, sometimes she would sink into union with God so intense that she actually rose off the floor and floated in the air. This would happen unexpectedly, for instance, when she was helping with the dishes. But she was also romantic and enthusiastic. She would grab a set of castanets and dance around the room when things seemed dull during recreation time.

Teresa of Avila was born in Spain during the years when Martin Luther was beginning the Reformation in Germany (February 18). The young Teresa wasn't that interested in religion. She preferred romance novels and beautiful clothes. At the age of 21 she decided to enter the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation, which was like a club for young women. The richest nuns received special treatment, and the place was filled with visitors, gossip, games and good food. Teresa enjoyed the distractions. But after 20 years, she realized how much she longed for a place where the real Carmelite life would be lived – a place of prayer, silence and fasting. Boldly she asked for and received permission to begin such a community.

This reformed Carmelite convent was called "discalced." That means shoeless. The women who lived there wore simple rope sandals. Everyone shared in the chores equally, including Teresa.

When the Carmelite Father General came to visit Teresa's convent, he was so impressed that he asked her to begin discalced houses for Carmelite men. Through the work of reform Teresa met her friend John of the Cross (December 14), who shared her passion for prayer and simplicity.

In the midst of all this activity, Teresa also did a lot of writing. Her books about the spiritual life are considered classics. She wrote seven major works and several smaller ones. For that scholarship she is called a doctor – a wise teacher – of the church. She is the first woman to be given this title. She is also one of the most beloved saints of Spain and Latin America.

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

St. Martin de Porres

(1579-1639)

Feast Day: November 3

Martin de Porres was born in Lima Peru. Lima was a segregated city in which the Spanish had enslaved native Indians and kidnapped blacks from Africa to work in mines and plantations. The city of Lima was composed of the homes of the rich, surrounded by slums crowded with poor people, including blacks and native Indians. Martin's mother was black and his father, a wealthy Spanish nobleman, abandoned his wife and children, forcing them to live in poverty.

By the time Martin was 12, he had become the apprentice of a local barber. In those days, barbers did not only cut hair. They also set broken bones, dressed wounds, prescribed healing herbs for the sick, and listened to people's troubles. Martin soon earned the trust of his patients.

At 15 he volunteered to be a lay helper at a Dominican monastery in Lima. He was given responsibility for jobs no one else wanted. Some of the priests thought that, because Martin was black he should not be there at all. Others, noticing his talent and goodness, tried to talk him into advancing to the priesthood. At age 24 Martin became a brother. But he continued to do the simplest tasks. He knew that this work gave him the flexibility to do great good. He cared for sick members of the monastery, scrubbed floors, fed the horses and donkeys, tended the gardens and cleaned the toilets. He also gave guidance, often showing a puzzling knowledge of people's secret concerns, and made peace between people in conflict.

Brother Martin fed many needy people each day with the monastery's leftovers. He began to lodge the sick and the homeless there, too, until every vacant room and even the halls were filled. When his fellow Dominicans complained, he found other places for people.

Martin began a home for abandoned street children. The home was the first place of its kind in the Americas. It was open to all, regardless of race. It had a paid staff of a chaplain, doctor, nurse and counselors.

Martin planted orchards for the poor on unused land. This made figs, olives and oranges available to people who could not afford them otherwise. Then he showed poor people to care for the trees. Martin's closeness to God gave him a reverence for all creation.

When he died people of every race turned out together to mourn him. The poor considered him their hero. He is the patron saint of interracial justice.

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini

(1850-1917)

Feast Day: November 13

How can we put a limit to our affection and to our energy when we consider the interests of Jesus? . . . Let us not shirk and dream and wait to help. His children who are this moment in pain, in want, crushed, and abandoned by the society of men who are mortal microscopic things compared to Christ! Let our . . . hands do the work of a hundred hands and bring His love and aid to the lost souls, to the poor in prisons, tenements, streets, mines, hospitals, fields, and wherever is suffering!

(Frances Xavier Cabrini)

“The whole world is not wide enough for me,” remarked the small woman. The travels of Frances Xavier Cabrini covered the United States from New Jersey to Seattle, from Chicago to New Orleans.

Frances was the youngest child in a large family in Italy. Her dream from early childhood was to spread the faith in China, as her patron saint Francis Xavier had done (December 3). After training to be a schoolteacher, she applied to join a religious order but was refused. After working with orphans for a few years, Frances decided to start the first order of missionary sisters. Soon an abandoned friary became the new home of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

Seven women who had joined Frances in service at the orphanage became the first members of the order. Their special work was teaching young girls anywhere education was needed. In a few years so many women had come to join the order that the friary became severely overcrowded. Like Frances, many of these women had been refused by other religious communities. New convents were begun in Milan and Rome.

To her surprise, Frances began to receive encouragement to look west instead of east for her missionary work. Of the 50,000 Italians newly arrived in New York, many had never had any religious education and most didn't go to Mass. Their lives were spent in crowded tenement neighborhoods. Archbishop Corrigan of New York City sent Frances a formal invitation to begin her missionary work there. When Frances and her sisters got to New York, the archbishop's plans for them had fallen through. He wanted them to return on the next boat, but Frances was determined to stay. Soon she had earned a reputation as a shrewd bargainer in her handling of money. Always she trusted that God would provide, and she was right.

By the time Frances died, she had begun 67 badly needed schools, orphanages and hospitals. These were located in the United States, Central and South America, Italy, France and England. In all, Frances crossed the ocean 30 times. Mother Cabrini, as Frances came to be called, became the first American citizen to be canonized. She is a patron saint of immigrants.

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

Dorothy Day

(1897-1980)

November 29—Anniversary of the Death of Dorothy Day

An understanding of the dogma of the Mystical Body is perhaps the greatest need of the present time. It is a further explanation of the Incarnation....Christ is the head and we are the members.

And the illnesses of injustice, hate, disunion, race hatred, prejudice, class war, selfishness, greed, nationalism, and war weaken this Mystical Body, just as prayer and sacrifices of countless of the faithful strengthen it....All men are neighbors and Christ told us we should love our neighbors whether they be friend or enemy.

(Dorothy Day)

These were the years of the Great Depression (1930s), a time of great hardship for many people. Dorothy Day had become a noted writer and began to report on the sufferings of the poor for Catholic magazines. In 1932, covering a hunger march in Washington, DC, she prayed in tears that she might find some way “to change conditions, not just report them.”

When she got back to New York, it seemed that her prayer had been answered in an unusual way. A stranger named Peter Maurin was waiting to see her. He suggested that she start a newspaper that combined her ideals of a just society with her Catholic faith. Thus was born *The Catholic Worker*. It sold on the streets of New York City for one cent so that everyone could afford it.

People who felt inspired by the paper began stopping by to volunteer their help. Hungry people would join the staff for soup and bread or a cup of coffee. With the only money she had, Dorothy rented an apartment to house homeless people. It became the first of many Catholic Worker Houses. In time, Catholic Worker Houses would also be set up in Boston, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Los Angeles, and other cities.

Dorothy and the other staff members lived in voluntary poverty. They depended on God to meet their financial needs. Dorothy herself dressed in the used clothing that people donated to the house. Dorothy made the works of mercy the centerpiece of her life. The spiritual works of mercy are to admonish the sinner, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and the dead. The corporal works of mercy are to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to ransom the captive, to harbor the harborless, to visit the sick, and to bury the dead.

Her Catholic Worker Houses were centers of hospitality for the poor, hungry, naked and dispossessed. In this way she served the personal needs of people. She also confronted public policies and laws that kept the poor from rising out of their poverty. Here she addressed the causes of injustice.

Source

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).
A Passion for Life. Joan Chittister. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

St. Francis Xavier

(1506-1552)

Feast Day: December 3

St. Francis Xavier began his life's work of bringing the gospel to the Far East shortly after his ordination as a Jesuit priest. Even though he often got seasick and had trouble learning foreign languages, he eventually taught and baptized people in India, Ceylon, the Philippines and Japan.

After arriving on the island off the coast of India, Xavier threw himself into his ministry, guiding the Portuguese explorers and seafarers back to the practice of their Catholic faith and teaching Indians about Christ.

After some months, Xavier started working among fishing folk on the southern coast of India. Then he moved on to Ceylon, known today as Sri Lanka. Xavier's method of instruction was gentle and enjoyable. He would gather men and women, young and old, and get them to repeat the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Hail Mary in their own language, with Xavier explaining the meaning. Slowly people converted.

In 1545 Xavier left India and Ceylon for what is now Malaysia. Other missionaries had followed him to India, so by the close of the 1500s, Jesuits ministered in sixteen main villages along the coast of India. Each village had a small church and a school.

During Francis Xavier's travels, he met and converted a young Japanese man who persuaded him to bring the Christian faith to Japan. After arriving in Japan in 1549, Xavier and his companions began their work of spreading the Gospel in a land where Buddhism and Shintoism were the predominant religions. As Xavier entered a town or village, he would ring a bell and invite the inhabitants to come and listen to the truths of Christ. Gradually the Jesuits constructed small churches and settled in the towns on a southern island of Japan.

Wherever he went, Xavier refused any comforts that weren't available to the people he served. Often he slept on the ground and lived on rice and water. He sang to the children and cared for the sick. He spread the gospel by dealing with people in a gentle and courteous way.

Source

A Popular History of the Catholic Church. Carl Koch. (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1997).

Companion to the Calendar. Mary Ellen Hynes. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

Thomas Merton

(1915-1968)

December 10—The Anniversary of the Death of Thomas Merton

The Christian life – and especially the contemplative life – is a continual discovery of Christ in new and unexpected places.
(Thomas Merton)

In 1949 a surprising title made its way onto the best-seller lists. *The Seven Storey Mountain* was not a mystery or a tale of alpine adventure. It was the autobiography of a clever young man named Thomas Merton who had turned his back on the modern world to adopt the austere, medieval regime of a Trappist monk. What made the book so fascinating was that Merton appeared to be, as he described himself, “the complete twentieth-century man.” He had enjoyed a life of freedom, excitement, and pleasure only, in the end, to reject it all as an illusion.

Merton told a story – by turns funny and sad – of the search for his true identity and home: of his orphaned childhood, his education in France, England, and Columbia University, of the pride and selfishness that brought nothing but unhappiness to himself and others. And he told of how his search had led him ultimately to the Catholic church and finally, on the eve of World War II, to the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. On viewing the silent monks, dressed in their white habits and kneeling in prayer in the chapel, Merton had exclaimed, “This is the true center of America.”

It was in some respects a classic tale of conversion. And yet for many readers, encountering Merton’s book in the postwar years, his story struck a very contemporary note. It fed a widespread hunger for spiritual values in a world poised between war and the empty promise of “happy days.” Suddenly Merton was the most famous monk in America. The irony was not lost on him. He had become a Trappist in part to escape the claims of ego, the anxious desire to “be somebody.” And yet his superiors felt his writing had something to offer the world and they ordered him to keep at it. And so he did. Yet for all the books he would go on to produce, he remained firmly identified with his autobiography. It became a painful burden, “*The Seven Storey Mountain* is the work of a man I never even heard of,” he would later protest.

One aspect of the book that he particularly came to regret was the attitude of pious scorn directed at “the world” and its citizens. He had seemed to regard the monastery as a haven set apart from the *massa damnata*. Only with time had he realized that “the monastery is not an ‘escape’ from the world. On the contrary, by being in the monastery I take my true part in all the struggles and sufferings of the world.”

In one of his journals he recorded a moment of mystical insight that marked a critical turning point in his life as a monk. It occurred during an errand in Louisville, “at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district.”

I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness.

Merton suddenly experienced a sense of solidarity with the human race – not simply in sin, but in grace. “There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun... There are no strangers!... The gate of heaven is everywhere.”

For years Merton had devoted creative thought to the meaning of monastic and contemplative life. But from this point on he became increasingly concerned with making connections between the monastery and the wider world. Scorn and sarcasm gave way to compassion and friendship. This was reflected in his writing. Along with the more traditional spiritual books there appeared articles on war, racism, and other issues of the day. Long before such positions were commonplace in the church he was a prophetic voice for peace and nonviolence. In fact, his writings were so controversial that for some years he was ordered to remain silent on “political” topics. Only after the Second Vatican Council was he freed from such censorship.

Ironically, this increasing engagement with the secular world and its problems was accompanied by an increasing attraction to an even more total life of contemplation. In 1961 he was given permission to move into a hermitage on the monastery grounds. There he continued to perfect the delicate balance between contemplative prayer and openness to the world that had become the distinctive feature of his spirituality.

Merton maintained a wide circle of friends. Many of them knew something of the tensions which at times characterized relations with his religious superiors. In the spirit of the 1960s some of them frankly questioned whether his vocation wasn't an anachronism and challenged him to “get with it.” In fact, Merton's personal temptations were all in the direction of even greater solitude among the Carthusians or in some other remote setting. But in the end he always returned to the conviction that his best service to the world lay in faithfulness to his monastic vocation, and that his spiritual home was at Gethsemani.

In his last years a more liberal abbot did encourage Merton to venture forth. In 1968 he accepted an invitation to address an international conference of Christian monks in Bangkok. Merton was particularly excited about the prospect of exploring his deep interest in Eastern spirituality. In this respect, as his journals show, the trip marked a new breakthrough, another encounter with the “gate of heaven” that is everywhere.

On December 10 he delivered his talk and afterward retired to his room for a shower and nap. There he was later found dead, apparently electrocuted by the faulty wiring of a fan. For all his restless searching he had ended exactly as he had foreseen in *The Seven Storey Mountain*. The book had concluded with a mysterious speech in the voice of God:

I will give you what you desire. I will lead you into solitude... Everything that touches you shall burn you, and you will draw your hand away in pain, until you have withdrawn yourself from all things. Then you will be all alone... That you may become the brother of God and learn to know the Christ of the burnt men.

Source

All Saints – Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time. Robert Ellsberg. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997).

Saints Gallery

1. Read together the saint profile that you and your family or table group have been given.
2. Develop a poster for your saint or holy person using drawings or pictures from magazines that illustrate what he or she stood for (e.g., Dorothy Day and serving the poor, St. Paul and proclaiming the Good News, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and teaching, etc.). Put the name of the saint on the poster and find several pictures that illustrate the life and actions of the saint.
3. Read the Gospel for the Feast of All Saints: Matthew 5:1-12.
4. Identify which beatitude(s) best describes the saint you have been exploring together. Write the appropriate Beatitude (or key words) on your saint poster.
5. Complete the following sentences and then write them on the saint poster:
 - *(Saint or holy person) wants us to live our Catholic faith by....*
 - *(Saint or holy person) shared with the world the gift of*
 - *If (Saint or holy person) were here today, he or she would tell us to....*
 - *If we want to follow the example of (Saint or holy person), we should...*

Think about the Beatitude gift that God gave the saint on your poster. Think about how you could use that same gift in your own way in your daily life. Come up with one specific example of how you can use that gift and write it on your poster. Start your sentence with:

"I can use the gift of _____ by _____."

Beatitudes Skits

(Based on Matthew 5:3-10)

Note: Use this handout for the In Depth Learning Experience for the adolescent group. Cut out each beatitude and the instructions that go with it, and then put them into the bag with the skit supplies.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

The poor in spirit know that everything is a gift from God. They know that they are dependent on God, not material possessions, for their security. They are not rugged individuals who claim that they don't need anybody. They receive God into their lives by graciously accepting the help of others.

Task: Your group must use the contents of this bag to create a two-minute skit that expresses the essential meaning of the first beatitude without using the words of the beatitude. Characters in your skit must include two people with itchy backs (both have a sack of equally valuable coins), one salesman with a golden back scratcher, and any other characters you deem necessary to get the message across.

2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted

Those who mourn are aware that something is wrong. Their mourning motivates them to relieve the suffering in the world and in themselves caused by evil. They who cannot or will not mourn shield themselves from the suffering in our world and pretend it's not there. They shut off their emotions, so that they will not have to feel the pain, and they believe that if there is no suffering then there is no reason for them to act on behalf of those who suffer. Those who mourn feel their own pain and the pain of others, and work to alleviate that pain. The depths of pain can be the pathway to great peace and joy if one is open to the gift of mourning.

Task: Your group must use the contents of this bag to create a two-minute skit that expresses the essential meaning of the second beatitude without using the words of the beatitude. Characters in your skit must include a calloused talk-show host who is insensitive to the reality of suffering in the world, a victim of a tragedy, a concerned citizen, and any other characters you deem necessary to get the message across.

3. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth

The meek embrace the gift of physical powerlessness. They have the courage to act without the false security of weapons. They are careful to unleash their anger at proper times and in proper ways. They allow God to control their emotions rather than allowing their emotions to control themselves. They do not seek to get their way by overpowering others. They are patient. They do not jump to quick solutions to problems; rather, they will take time to understand before speaking and acting.

Task: Your group must use the contents of this bag to create a two-minute skit that expresses the essential meaning of the third beatitude without using the words of the beatitude. Characters in your skit must include a corrupt army general, a mother of a soldier who was beaten to death by other soldiers, and any other characters you deem necessary to get the message across.

4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled

They who hunger and thirst for righteousness want goodness and justice, especially for the poor, more than anything. They feel as though they will die without it. They want their relationship with God to be right, they want human relationships to be right, and they want all the relationships of creation to be right. Whether they succeed or not in getting these relationships right is not the point, they are blessed because they want it bad, and they work for it.

Task: Your group must use the contents of this bag to create a two-minute skit that expresses the essential meaning of the fourth beatitude without using the words of the beatitude. Characters in your skit must include a sweatshop foreman, two assembly line workers (one who is resigned to work, the other knows there is more to life), and any other characters you deem necessary to get the message across.

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy:

The merciful are those who refuse to perpetuate a cycle of violence. We are merciful when we have a right to punish another person and we choose not to exercise that right. Merciful people act with kindness where others might seek revenge. When the merciful call others to responsibility, they do so with kindness and compassion, not with an intention to destroy the offender.

Task: Your group must use the contents of this bag to create a two-minute skit that expresses the essential meaning of the fifth beatitude without using the words of the beatitude. Characters in your skit must include a state governor who is reviewing the case of a death row inmate, and any other characters you deem necessary to get the message across.

6. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God:

The pure in heart are motivated by God alone. They give their heart to God and are given the gift of seeing as God sees. They see the sacredness and essential beauty of God's creation. Each person they encounter is seen first and foremost as a beloved child of God. Seeing another person in a negative or judgmental way is a sign that one's heart is not pure, and one's vision of the other's basic goodness is clouded.

Task: Your group must use the contents of this bag to create a two-minute skit that expresses the essential meaning of the sixth beatitude without using the words of the beatitude. Characters in your skit must include two teens (one likes to gossip, the other knows that God sees all people as equal in dignity), and any other characters you deem necessary to get the message across.

7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God:

Shalom is the biblical word for peace, but *shalom* is not passive peace. It means much more than just the absence of conflict. The suffix, “makers”, implies that peace must be constructed actively. One can not say, “I will keep peace by not getting involved.” Involvement is necessary for peacemaking. Peacemakers work actively to bring about the justice for which others hunger and thirst.

Task: Your group must use the contents of this bag to create a two-minute skit that expresses the essential meaning of the seventh beatitude without using the words of the beatitude. Characters in your skit must include members of two households who are neighbors. A fight breaks out in one of the households; the neighbors in the other household can hear the fight escalating. You may add any other characters you deem necessary to get the message across.

8. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven:

Jesus did not come to make life easy for us; he came to invite humanity to greatness. Being blessed by God inevitably will lead to persecution in one way or another. God's gifts to each person are unique and can be easily misunderstood by those who do not appreciate diversity. We often face criticism when we live according to the gifts God has given us. Suffering persecution for the sake of goodness is one way that we carry the cross of Christ. Our consolation is not in an easy life; our consolation is in the knowledge that we are living for righteousness' sake – we are living for the kingdom of heaven.

Task: Your group must use the contents of this bag to create a two-minute skit that expresses the essential meaning of the eighth beatitude without using the words of the beatitude. Characters in your skit must include a teacher, a student who helps the teacher with a task, several students who tease the helping student, and any other characters you deem necessary to get the message across.

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10)

(Taken from *Your Catholic Family* by James Merhaut, published by St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006.)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

The poor in spirit know that everything is a gift from God. They know that they are dependent on God, not material possessions, for their security. They are not rugged individuals who claim that they don't need anybody. They receive God into their lives by graciously accepting the help of others.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted

Those who mourn are aware that something is wrong. Their mourning motivates them to relieve the suffering in the world and in themselves caused by evil. They who cannot or will not mourn shield themselves from the suffering in our world and pretend it's not there. They shut off their emotions, so that they will not have to feel the pain, and they believe that if there is no suffering then there is no reason for them to act on behalf of those who suffer. Those who mourn feel their own pain and the pain of others, and work to alleviate that pain. The depths of pain can be the pathway to great peace and joy if one is open to the gift of mourning.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth

The meek embrace the gift of physical powerlessness. They have the courage to act without the false security of weapons. They are careful to unleash their anger at proper times and in proper ways. They allow God to control their emotions rather than allowing their emotions to control themselves. They do not seek to get their way by overpowering others. They are patient. They do not jump to quick solutions to problems; rather, they will take time to understand before speaking and acting.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled

They who hunger and thirst for righteousness want goodness and justice, especially for the poor, more than anything. They feel as though they will die without it. They want their relationship with God to be right, they want human relationships to be right, and they want all the relationships of creation to be right. Whether they succeed or not in getting these relationships right is not the point, they are blessed because they want it bad, and they work for it.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy

The merciful are those who refuse to perpetuate a cycle of violence. We are merciful when we have a right to punish another person and we choose not to exercise that right. Merciful people act with kindness where others might seek revenge. When the merciful call others to responsibility, they do so with kindness and compassion, not with an intention to destroy the offender.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God

The pure in heart are motivated by God alone. They give their heart to God and are given the gift of seeing as God sees. They see the sacredness and essential beauty of God's creation. Each person they encounter is seen first and foremost as a beloved child of God. Seeing another person in a negative or judgmental way is a sign that one's heart is not pure, and one's vision of the other's basic goodness is clouded.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God

Shalom is the biblical word for peace, but *shalom* is not passive peace. It means much more than just the absence of conflict. The suffix, "makers", implies that peace must be constructed actively. One cannot say, "I will keep peace by not getting involved." Involvement is necessary for peacemaking. Peacemakers work actively to bring about the justice for which others hunger and thirst.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Jesus did not come to make life easy for us; he came to invite humanity to greatness. Being blessed by God inevitably will lead to persecution in one way or another. God's gifts to each person are unique and can be easily misunderstood by those who do not appreciate diversity. We often face criticism when we live according to the gifts God has given us. Suffering persecution for the sake of goodness is one way that we carry the cross of Christ. Our consolation is not in an easy life; our consolation is in the knowledge that we are living for righteousness' sake - we are living for the kingdom of heaven.

Beatitude Skit Worksheet

Directions: As you watch each skit, try to determine which beatitude the actors are trying to illustrate. Write the beatitude on the line.

Skit #1 _____

Skit #2 _____

Skit #3 _____

Skit #4 _____

Skit #5 _____

Skit #6 _____

Skit #7 _____

Skit #8 _____

My Beatitude Gifts

Do I have the gift of being poor in spirit?

- You have experienced the gift of being poor in spirit if you can draw a picture or write about a time when you really needed help, you asked for help, and you received help from someone who loves you.

- Think about all the times you prayed this past week. Write the number of times you prayed on this line_____

People who are poor in spirit pray a lot to God because they know that God means more than anything else in life.

- Write down or draw a picture of your most prized possession.

- How can you share your prized possession with others?

People who are poor in spirit enjoy things, but they love people more than things.

Do I have the gift of mourning?

- Draw a picture of something or write about something that makes you sad.

People who have the gift of mourning feel very sad when something goes wrong.

- Write one thing you could do to help change the thing that makes you sad.

Do I have the gift of being meek?

- Think about a time when you were angry and you said something mean or maybe you even hit someone.
- Describe or draw a picture of how you could have expressed your anger in a better way.

People who have the gift of being meek get angry about things, but they don't let their anger make them do things that they know are not right.

Do I have the gift of hungering and thirsting for righteousness?

- How can the world have peace?
- How can poverty be eliminated from the world?
- What should our relationship with creation be like?
- What should our relationship with God be like?

If it was easy for you to answer these questions in simple, clear, and straightforward language, then you may have the gift of hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

Do I have the gift of being merciful?

- Think about a time when a person or a group of people hurt you, your family, or your community. Draw a picture or write about what you did or did not do to that person in return.
- How can you help that person or group to take responsibility for what happened to you without seeking revenge?

Do I have the gift of being a peacemaker?

- Is there a war going on in your family, in your community, or in our world? Draw a picture of that war or describe who is fighting and why they are fighting.

- What can you do to help stop the war?

If you are willing to get involved to help stop the war, you may have the gift of being a peacemaker.

The Meek

Cut Out

Cutting Tip: Begin cutting by poking a hole in the center of each cut-out box, then work your way out toward the dashed lines with your scissors.

Cut Out

The Lord is my
strength
-Psalm 28:7

Cut Out

Cut Out

Are Not Weak!

Revenge, Justice, or Mercy

(Families with Children)

Scenario One

Jared was playing soccer outside with his neighbor, Melinda. Jared's mother saw them playing too close to the road, so she opened the window and told them to play in the back yard. Jared and Melinda went to the back yard to play. After a while, Melinda kicked the ball and it rolled back into the front yard by the road. Both kids chased the ball and continued to play near the road. Melinda reminded Jared that his mother told them not to play near the road, but Jared said, "Don't worry about it, she won't mind."

Then Jared kicked the ball and it bounced into the street as a car was passing by. The car screeched as the driver pressed his break pedal and swerved to try to avoid the ball. Jared's mother heard the noise and ran outside to see what the commotion was all about.

Jared deliberately disobeyed his mother, and broke the bond of trust she had with him, and he almost caused an automobile accident. His mother needs to teach him a lesson about his irresponsible behavior.

Discuss the following questions:

- How would Jared's mother respond if she wanted to seek revenge on Jared?
- How would Jared's mother respond if she wanted to be just or fair with Jared?
- How would Jared's mother respond if she wanted to show mercy to Jared?

Consider the following distinctions as you discuss your answers to the questions:

Revenge: The response is unreasonably disproportionate to the offense in that the injured party seeks to respond in a way that repays the injury with greater intensity.

Justice: The response is reasonable and fair. The punishment for the offender is commensurate with the offense.

Mercy: The offender is still held accountable in some way, but the injured party does not seek to punish the offender to the point of equal justice. In some cases, a merciful response can seem unreasonably insufficient.

Revenge, Justice, or Mercy

(Adolescents)

Scenario Two

Leticia has been enjoying chatting online with her friends for years. One of her friends, Joey, had been dating another one of her friends, Ada, for a couple of months, but Joey and Ada recently broke up. Homecoming was just a couple of weeks away, so Joey and Leticia agreed to go to the dance together just as friends. Ada still liked Joey, so she became very jealous when she heard that Joey was taking Leticia to the Homecoming dance.

Ada created a phony screen name for herself online and began spreading vicious rumors about Leticia hoping that Leticia's friends would turn against her and maybe even Joey would cancel the date to Homecoming.

Some of Leticia's friends believed the rumors and stopped associating with Leticia. Others did not believe the rumors and found out that it was Ada who was spreading them. One of these friends told Leticia that Ada spread the rumors. Joey and Leticia decided that they needed to confront Ada.

Discuss the following questions:

- How would Leticia and Joey respond to Ada's attack if they wanted to get revenge on Ada?
- How would Leticia and Joey respond to Ada's attack if they wanted to be just or fair with Ada?
- How would Leticia and Joey respond to Ada's attack if they wanted to be merciful with Ada?

Consider the following distinctions as you discuss your answers to the questions:

Revenge: The response is unreasonably disproportionate to the offense in that the injured party seeks to respond in a way that repays the injury with greater intensity.

Justice: The response is reasonable and fair. The punishment for the offender is commensurate with the offense.

Mercy: The offender is still held accountable in some way, but the injured party does not seek to punish the offender to the point of equal justice. In some cases, a merciful response can seem unreasonably insufficient.

Revenge, Justice, or Mercy

(Adults)

Scenario Three

Stephen and Linda have been married for eight years. Stephen works as a mail carrier for the United States Post Office, and Linda works for an accounting firm. They have two children aged seven and five. Lately their marriage has been under considerable stress due to their job schedules, school responsibilities with the children, and Stephen's aging mother who has cancer.

One evening after the children were in bed, Linda confessed to Stephen that she was having an affair with a man from her office. Stephen was crushed. Linda told Stephen that she wanted to end the affair, quit her job, and try to recommit herself to her family and perhaps return to a different job later. Stephen has to decide what his next move is.

Discuss the following questions:

- How would Stephen respond to Linda if he wanted to get revenge on her?
- How would Stephen respond to Linda if he wanted to be just or fair with her?
- How would Stephen respond to Linda if he wanted to be merciful with her?

Consider the following distinctions as you discuss your answers to the questions:

Revenge: The response is unreasonably disproportionate to the offense in that the injured party seeks to respond in a way that repays the injury with greater intensity.

Justice: The response is reasonable and fair. The punishment for the offender is commensurate with the offense.

Mercy: The offender is still held accountable in some way, but the injured party does not seek to punish the offender to the point of equal justice. In some cases, a merciful response can seem unreasonably insufficient.

Peace Begins with a Smile

Peace Begins with a Smile

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Peace Begins with a Smile

Closing Prayer Service

Opening Prayer

Leader

Creator God,

You formed each of us in your image, and placed in us the gifts which can bring your love to others. Hear our prayer as we strive to be living saints and share our gifts with our world today.

Reading

Reader One

A Reading from Revelation 7:9-14

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

Reader Two

"Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Reader One

And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing,

Reader Two

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Reader One

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying,

Reader Three

"Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?"

Reader One

I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me,

Reader Three

These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The Word of the Lord

All

Thanks be to God.

Litany of Saints

Leader

We close tonight by asking through prayer for continued guidance from those who have gone before us in faith. Long ago, they were called and chosen by God to share their gifts generously. The example of their lives can help us to strive to be more loving, more giving, and more Christ-like. And so we pray:

Reader

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, you taught many young people to know and love God.

All

Help us to understand our faith and to talk joyfully about God.

Reader

Saint Martin de Porres, you happily spent your life giving everything you had to others.

All

Help us to be generous with what we have been given, and to share our blessings cheerfully.

Reader

Saint Therese, you wanted only to love God, but you helped many people at the same time.

All

Help prayer to be easier when we find it difficult.

Reader

Saint Patrick, you loved to make people happy by telling wonderful stories about God and teaching people about Jesus.

All

Help us to tell others how much God loves them, and to develop our friendship with Jesus.

Reader

Saint Jude, you had great trust in the power of the Holy Spirit's loving energy.

All

Help us to trust in God's care and to come to you when things seem hopeless.

Reader

Saint Joseph, husband of Mary, you were always aware of God's presence.

All

Help us find God in our lives, and be with us at the hour of our death.

Reader

Saint John the Baptist, you pointed out Jesus to those who came to you.

All

Help us to recognize Jesus in all the ways He comes into our lives.

Reader

Saint Joan of Arc, God called you from your simple life as a shepherdess to lead a nation to freedom.

All

Help us to be brave and respond to God's call.

Leader

We ask all of this through Jesus Christ, who is our Savior and Lord, forever and ever.

All

Amen