



Teaching the Saints

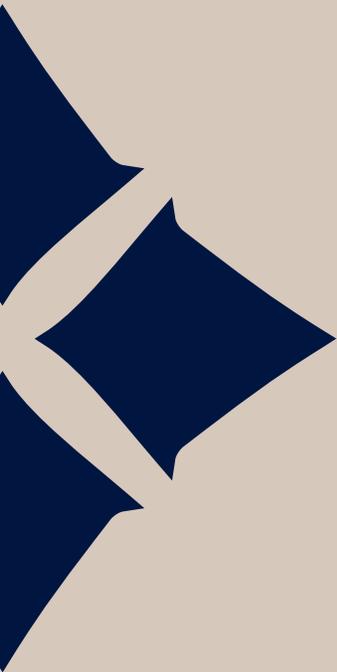
A Workbook for
Faith Formation
and Education

Saints for the month of
JANUARY

McGRATH INSTITUTE FOR CHURCH LIFE



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The saints selected for this month are drawn from the "Witnesses to Holiness" collection from Notre Dame Vision, a high school conference hosted by the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. Notre Dame Vision asks teenagers to consider their God-given talents and how they will use their gifts to respond to God's call for their life. For more information, visit vision.nd.edu.

The illustrations of saints used in this workbook were created by Julie Lonneman, who holds exclusive rights to the further distribution and publication of the art.

How to Use This Workbook

Turn to the witness and intercession of the saints to lead middle school and high school students toward a deeper sense of God's invitation to follow Him. This free teaching resource features the lives of the saints paired with short guided prompts for further reflection, discussion and action.

The worksheets can be used by youth, parents, teachers, religious educators and ministers to celebrate saint feast days during January. Adapt the worksheets for use in the classroom, home or parish to highlight the myriad and unique ways that God calls us to use our gifts to serve the Church and world.

Each worksheet includes the following:

- ◆ A short biography on each saint's life and witness
- ◆ A reflection inviting the student to consider ways each saint resonates with their faith journey
- ◆ A challenge prompting the student to put the saint's witness into action

Holy Mary, the Mother of God

◆ First Century



Mary received the ultimate call from God—God called her, a virgin, to be the mother of Jesus. As a teenager, probably around age 14, Mary must have been terrified by what this would mean for her. Nevertheless, she drew on her faith in God and accepted this challenging role.

The Bible does not tell us anything about Mary's early years. Other sources name her as the daughter of Anne and Joachim and identify her birthplace as Jerusalem or Galilee. In the Gospel of Luke, Mary was living in Nazareth and engaged to Joseph, a carpenter descended from King David, when the angel Gabriel visited her and announced that she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

Mary and Joseph both knew that her pregnancy could be very scandalous and damaging to her reputation. Rather than leave her, Joseph decided to fulfill his promise of marriage and serve as Jesus' earthly father.

When the angel visited Mary, he also announced that Mary's relative, Elizabeth, was pregnant at a time in her life when it was thought that she was much too old to conceive. Mary knew that she had someone who would understand her situation, so she went to live with Elizabeth for three months. She gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem.

As Jesus began his ministry, the Bible tells us little about Mary's life. John's Gospel places Mary at the wedding feast of Cana. When the party ran out of wine, Mary instructed the servants to do whatever Jesus asked them. Performing his first miracle, Jesus turned jars of water into wine. According to John, Mary was also present at the crucifixion. We can only imagine the agony that she felt standing at the foot of her son's cross. Jesus instructed his apostle John and Mary to take care of one another, and we are told that Mary lived out the rest of her life in the house of John.

Mary has an important place in Catholicism and in the lives of many Catholics. She is recognized as a leading member of the communion of saints and of the Church. Many people pray through Mary and recognize her as an important role model for Christians. She certainly answered a difficult call with great faith and courage.

And Mary said: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.

—Luke 1:46–48 (Beginning of the Magnificat)

Reflect

What about Mary's life stands out to you?

The radiance of Mary's example comes from her utter trust and willingness to give "herself entirely to the person and to the work of her Son" (CCC 492). Even when it was difficult, Mary responded by trusting what God asked of her.

Who do you trust in your life? What allows you to trust them?

Act

Mary's "response in faith" to God's invitation does not mean she knew all that was to come. Yet she decided to respond with a 'yes' with the knowledge God would never abandon her on her journey. We might find ourselves like Mary as we enter into the new year, not exactly sure of all that is to come, but ready to say 'yes' to God's invitations for us.

Where is God inviting you to say 'yes' in your life this new year? What commitments is he inviting you to make or consider?

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

- ◆ 1774-1821; New York, United States
- ◆ Feast Day: January 4



Elizabeth was born into a wealthy New York family. At the age of twenty, she married William Magee Seton, a wealthy merchant whom she loved very much. The couple had five children before William fell seriously ill with tuberculosis. They traveled to Italy hoping that William would recover from his illness, but he died in 1803.

Elizabeth lived for six months with an Italian family who taught her the Catholic faith. Feeling a call to conversion, Elizabeth returned to the United States with her children and entered the Catholic Church in 1805. However, her friends and family disapproved of her decision to become Catholic, and did little to help support her children.

While struggling to support her family, Elizabeth met a priest in Baltimore who invited her to open a Catholic school for girls. Elizabeth accepted the job, and other women joined in her work. They soon formed a new religious order, the Sisters of St. Joseph. After being approved by the bishop, the sisters took vows and began calling Elizabeth “Mother Seton,” as the superior of their order. Elizabeth died in 1821, leaving behind many communities devoted to education. Mother Seton’s sisters were already spread throughout the world, establishing schools and orphanages.

Elizabeth Ann Seton is admired for her devotion to her children, students, sisters, and God. Elizabeth’s schools formed the foundation for the Catholic parochial education system present and vibrant in the United States today. She was the first native-born American to be named a saint.

The first purpose of our daily life is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills; and thirdly, to do it because it is his will.

—St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Reflect

What about St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's life stands out to you?

Although she was not born Catholic, the circumstances of Elizabeth's life brought her into contact with many faithful Catholics. The witness and practice of their faith opened her eyes to its beauty, especially the Blessed Virgin Mary. Having lost her mother at an early age, she began to rely on Mary's intercession and protection. This culminated with her joining the Catholic Church in 1805.

What do you find beautiful about the Catholic faith?

Act

It is reported that Elizabeth had a great devotion to Psalm 23. Take a moment to read and pray through its words. Then, either individually or in a group, take a moment to list silently or aloud the ways God has been with you in the course of the past couple weeks.

St. André Bessette

- ◆ 1845–1937; Canada
- ◆ Feast Day: January 6



St. André Bessette grew up just outside Montreal. When he was young, he loved the Holy Family and the Church. One night, he had a dream of a beautiful church, which he never forgot as he grew older. Tragically, when André was twelve, his parents died and left him and 11 his siblings orphaned.

André decided to put off his education and work in New England to support his brothers and sisters. He later returned to Montreal and answered a call at age 25 to enter the Congregation of Holy Cross, the religious order that founded the University of Notre Dame. Given his lack of education and poor health, André was unable to become a Holy Cross priest, but the bishop of Montreal suggested that André become a lay brother.

Although disappointed, André followed God in whatever ways he could. He worked as a doorkeeper at the congregation's high school in

Montreal. Here, he began to spread his love of St. Joseph to the poor and sick. Many people began to report healings after praying with André. He soon earned the title of "Miracle Man" of Montreal. So many people were visiting the high school hoping to find healing that students' parents and members of the community began to complain. In 1904, Brother André was allowed to build a small chapel on a hill near the school where he could tend to the sick.

André had not forgotten his dream of the beautiful church, and made plans for the shrine to be built at the site of his chapel. It took nearly fifty years to build St. Joseph's Oratory, which stands as the tallest building in Montreal and the most well-known shrine to St. Joseph in the world.

André never took credit for his work and healings. He always said that the real power came from St. Joseph and God. He died on January 6, 1937. It took a number of days before his burial could take place because of the millions of people who wished to pay their respects to Brother André. Pope John Paul II beatified André in 1982. On October 17, 2010 André was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI.

A daily crowd of the sick, the afflicted, the poor of all kinds—those who were handicapped or wounded by life—came to him. They found in his presence a welcome ear, comfort and faith in God. Do not the poor of today have as much need of such love, of such hope, of such education in prayer?

—St. John Paul II in a homily honoring St. André

Reflect

What about St. André Bessette's life stands out to you?

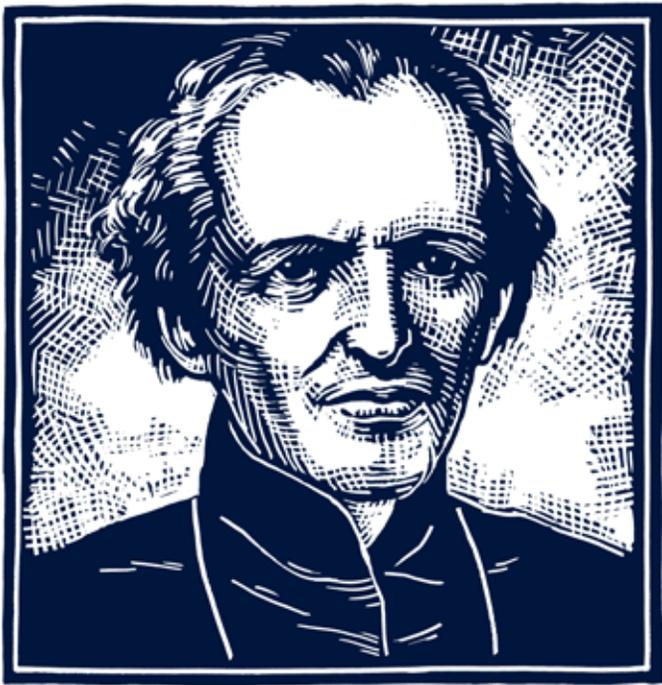
André's life cannot be understood apart from his deep trust and reliance on the intercession of St. Joseph. Even as he began to receive popular acclaim for the healings of the many sick people who visited him, St. André simply responded, "I do not cure. Saint Joseph cures."

In what ways might you be in need of healing in your own life? Do you know a friend, family member, or someone else in need of healing? Take a moment to ask St. Joseph's intercession for them.

Act

André had a dream of building a chapel to St. Joseph and asked the Archbishop of Montreal for permission. The Archbishop granted the request with the provision to build only with the money he had and to incur no debt. In the midst of slow work and financial difficulties, the chapel grew to a size that no one imagined, becoming what we know today as St. Joseph's Oratory.

Are you struggling with a task that seems difficult to begin? Perhaps it is regular prayer or a desire to do more service. Following the example of St. André, begin with small manageable steps. Ask yourself, "What small commitments can I make?" Do them. As you do this, ask for St. André's intercession.



Blessed Basil Moreau

- ◆ 1799-1873
- ◆ Feast Day: January 20

Basil Moreau was born February 11, 1799 in Laigné-en-Belin, France. In the wake of the French Revolution, Basil witnessed incredible turmoil and was deeply affected by the persecution against the Church. After the tensions began to subside, Basil joined the seminary. The anti-clerical laws of France had exiled or executed a majority of the French priests, and Basil was deeply concerned with how the lack of priests and educators led to poor religious education for citizens.

In 1835, Basil founded a group of priests to meet the people's spiritual needs, named the Society of Auxiliary Priests. This same year, he was asked by his bishop to take over leadership of the recently founded Brothers of Saint Joseph. In 1837, Basil joined the two societies into one community, the Congregation of Holy Cross. Basil later founded a community of sisters, completing his vision of a community

where priests, brothers, and sisters worked together in the model of the Holy Family to build up the the Kingdom of God.

Basil was a zealous man, passionate to spread the Gospel through education. Soon after professing his vows in the Congregation of Holy Cross, he began sending missions around the world. He sent Fr. Edward Sorin and six Holy Cross brothers to the United States where they founded the University of Notre Dame.

The Cross was center of Basil's spirituality. He made the motto for his community "Ave Crux, Spes Unica," or "Hail the Cross, our Only Hope." Despite many setbacks in founding the Congregation of Holy Cross, Basil trusted that through Divine Providence, his struggles would work to God's greater glory.

Basil died on January 20, 1873. In 2007, Basil was beatified in Le Mans, France. His zeal and passion for educating young hearts and minds continues to animate the religious of the Congregation of Holy Cross who find support, strength, and hope in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

God will be glorified by the works of justice and holiness that we produce, but as one who plants a tree is glorified by its produce.

—Blessed Basil Moreau, Sermons

Reflect

What about Blessed Basil Moreau's life stands out to you?

In the midst of the difficulties of the French Revolution, Moreau remained zealous and passionate about his mission to spread the Gospel. His zeal attracted other priests, brothers and later sisters. This early contingent of priests and brothers laid the foundation for the Congregation of Holy Cross, the religious order that founded the University of Notre Dame

Who do you know that is full of zeal and passion to spread the Gospel? What do they do?

Act

The lives of the saints show us how joy and zeal can attract others to the life of discipleship. Are you passionate about a particular hobby, activity or cause that you participate in regularly? Consider inviting someone else (or a group) to join you in that work over the next few weeks.

St. Agnes

- ◆ 291-ca. 304
- ◆ Feast Day: January 21
- ◆ Patron Saint of Girls and Engaged Couples



Agnes is one of the most popular early Christian martyrs. Her name is derived from the Greek word for “pure” (hagne), and because of the similarity of her name to the Latin word for “lamb” (agnus), the lamb has been her emblem since the sixth century. Agnes is often depicted with a lamb.

In early accounts of her life, Agnes was described as a beautiful girl who at age thirteen attracted the attention of many young noblemen competing for her hand in marriage. Refusing all marriage proposals, Agnes responded that she was betrothed to Jesus Christ, her heavenly spouse, and devoted to a life of consecration to the Savior.

According to tradition, a governor’s son tried to win her hand in marriage, yet Agnes refused his offer. During an era when Christians were tortured and treated as enemies of Rome, Agnes was denounced as a Christian and imprisoned. Agnes courageously proclaimed the Gospel

despite her captor’s promises of freedom and leniency if she would renounce her faith. When instruments of torture were placed before Agnes, she bravely responded by making the sign of the Cross. Agnes was condemned to a house of prostitution, but her powerful aura of purity infuriated the governor who eventually ordered her execution by beheading. An account of her martyrdom states, “she went to the place of her execution more cheerfully than others go to their wedding.” At the time of her execution she proclaimed, “You may be able to stain your sword with my blood, but you will never be able to profane my body consecrated to Christ.”

Agnes is a wonderful example of openness to God, courage in the face of persecution, and confidence in the grace and power of Jesus Christ. She is mentioned by name in the Eucharistic prayer of the Mass among seven other women, a reminder that her life was poured out in loving service for the Kingdom of God. As we share in the celebration of the Eucharist, we join our prayers with the disciples and martyrs, that like St. Agnes we may live as unhesitating and courageous disciples of Jesus.

Almighty ever-living God, who choose what is weak in the world to confound the strong, mercifully grant, that we, who celebrate the heavenly birthday of your martyr Saint Agnes, may follow her constancy in the faith.

—Opening prayer of the Feast of Agnes

Reflect

What about St. Agnes' life stands out to you?

According to an account of her martyrdom, Agnes "went to the place of her execution more cheerfully than others go to their wedding." Take a moment to think about this statement. What do you think allowed Agnes to feel joy, even as she was about to die? Take a moment to imagine how you might feel if you were condemned to die for your faith. Would you be willing? Do you think you would be joyful?

Act

On Agnes' feast day, it is tradition for the Pope to bless two lambs. The wool from these lambs is woven into a liturgical garment called the *pallium*, which is worn by archbishops throughout the world as a sign of their unity with the Pope. While lay people don't wear palliums, we are united with the Holy Father and all the clergy by our actions to spread the Gospel.

Take a moment to read a recent speech or address by the Pope. How can you live out a challenge or a message from the Pope this week? Consider discussing the reading with someone or tackling a project with a group of friends.

St. Marianne of Molokai

- ◆ 1838-1918; Hawaii
- ◆ Feast Day: January 23
- ◆ Patron Saint of Hawaii and Those with Leprosy



Marianne Cope was a member of the Sisters of Saint Francis in Syracuse, New York. She established two of the first hospitals in central New York. As Superior General of her order, she willingly accepted a call for missionary work in Hawaii. Marianne took six sisters with her to establish a hospital there in 1883.

Marianne was concerned with victims of leprosy, especially the orphan girls of leprosy patients. When those with the fatal disease were quarantined to the island of Molokai, Mother Marianne cheerfully moved her work to the island in 1888. Father Damien De Veuster was also working among the people on the island when he

contracted leprosy and was shunned by many church leaders and the government. Marianne greatly admired Fr. Damien and helped care for him until his death from the disease in 1889.

After Fr. Damien's death, Marianne took over his work with the boys' home he established and founded a similar school for girls with leprosy. Her unflinching optimism and trust encouraged her sisters to persevere among the lepers without fear for their own safety. She died of natural causes in 1918.

Father Damien and Mother Marianne were canonized by Pope Benedict XVI. They are celebrated as heroes in Hawaii on April 15, the day of Father Damien's death.

God of compassion, we bless your Name for the ministries of Damien and Marianne, who ministered to the lepers abandoned on Molokai in the Hawaiian Islands. Help us, following their examples, to be bold and loving in confronting the incurable plagues of our time, that your people may live in health and hope.

—Opening Prayer of the Feast of Damien and Marianne

Reflect

What about St. Marianne's life stands out to you?

Throughout history, a diagnosis of leprosy meant stigma and isolation. The skin lesions caused by the infection were often no match for the mental and emotional isolation for the sick who were quarantined in colonies, often far away from mainstream society.

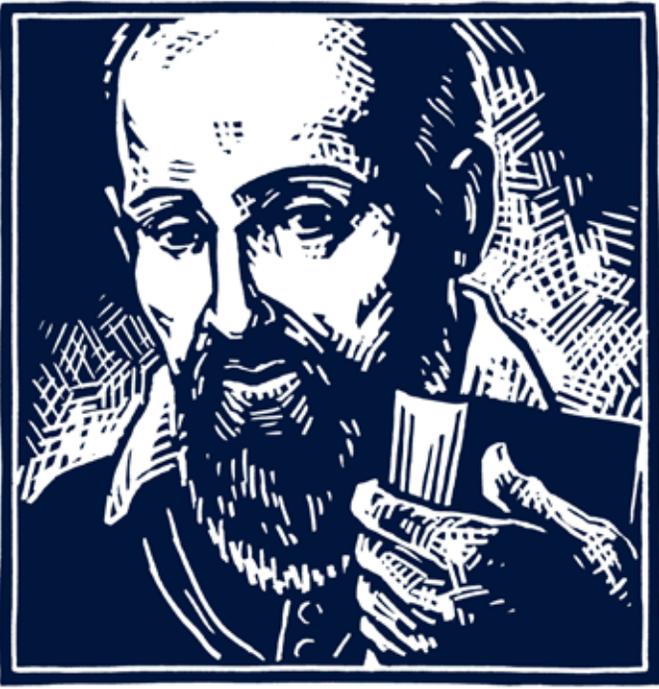
Imagine yourself as a leper who had no contact with mainstream society for many years. How do you think you would feel? What would you hope those living outside of the colony could understand about you? What can we do to serve the marginalized in today's society?

Act

Throughout the world, many places experience the effects of lesser-known diseases like leprosy. Catholic Relief Services and other organizations care for people and communities affected by widespread diseases. Take a moment to learn more about the work of these organizations. How can you get involved in their work?

St. Francis de Sales

- ◆ 1567-1622
- ◆ Feast Day: January 24
- ◆ Patron Saint of Journalists and Writers



Francis de Sales was born on August 21, 1567 in Savoy, France. As a teenager, Francis desired to serve God by becoming a priest, a desire that he kept secret from everyone except his mother. Francis' father had different expectations for his eldest son; he sent Francis to Paris to study law, and intended for him to marry and become a lawyer or a politician.

While enrolled at university, Francis obeyed all of his father's wishes but also pursued other interests. Francis ran in many circles and immersed himself in the culture of the busy city. Unfortunately, he soon became overworked, and became confused about his life's direction. In those moments of stress, Francis turned to prayer. Despite his father's disapproval, and through his mother's support, Francis decided to put his heart into theology and preparations for the priesthood. He was ordained in December 1593.

Knowing Francis had a wonderful speaking and writing ability, the bishop sent Francis to the city of Chablais where Catholicism was reviled and almost non-existent. The church pews were frequently empty, so Francis had to find a new way to reach the community. He decided to use his ability to write and his spirit of simplicity, communicating deep Catholic beliefs using simple analogies and carefully-chosen words. He was realistic in his explanations to people with no theological background, and he proposed arguments with incredible strength and gentleness. His arguments and letters were so convincing and relatable that tens of thousands of people in the city of Chablais converted to Catholicism in only four years.

Francis became popular for his ability to communicate heartfelt love, faith, and generosity through his preaching and writing. People from every walk of life wrote letters to Francis asking for advice on God's plan for their lives. He wrote to them all, encouraging them to "Be who you are, and be that well." Some of his letters were compiled into a book, *The Introduction to the Devout Life*, which is still popular today. Francis de Sales died in 1622.

Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow; the same everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow and every day. Either He will shield you from suffering, or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it.

—St. Francis de Sales

Reflect

What about St. Francis de Sales' life stands out to you?

Francis' growing desire to serve God as a priest and the expectations of his father caused tension in Francis' early life. In a similar way, we too might experience or have experienced competing expectations. Although Francis eventually chose the priesthood, he recognized there were many different paths to holiness and joy. As he wrote frequently, "Be who you are, and be that well."

What activities give you joy? Who is God calling you to be right now?

Act

Francis' busy schedule left little time for solitude and contemplation with God for which he longed. In modern times, not much has changed.

Take time today and this week to free yourself from technology and other distracting noise. Talk to God like you would a friend. Tell him about your day, the moments and things you are most grateful, and the worries on your heart. Rest in the knowledge that he hears you and loves you. Make a commitment to do this for a few days, taking notice of how it makes you feel.

St. Timothy

- ◆ First Century
- ◆ Feast Day: January 26



Timothy is one of the first generations of Christians in the New Testament. His father was Greek and his mother, Eunice, was a Jewish-Christian. His grandmother, Lois, was the first in his family to become Christian.

Timothy became an associate of St. Paul, helping him in his work in the churches at Corinth and Ephesus. Most likely, Timothy became the leader of the church at Ephesus at a young age.

While we have little information about Timothy's work as a leader of this community, we know from St. Paul that leadership in the early church was a difficult task, particularly for a person so young.

The leader of the community was required to exhort people to live a certain way, according to the spirit of Jesus Christ. Sometimes this meant recognizing the ways that the Gospel was at work in a specific group and other times it meant telling a community when it was failing to live as Christ taught. Just as Paul was frequently despised for his leadership, one can assume that Timothy also suffered because of the Gospel. In fact, legend tells us that Timothy was stoned and beaten to death for preaching against a pagan festival in Ephesus around the year 94.

As a young person in a position of leadership, Timothy has much to teach the Church today. Young people can be important leaders in the community. The Christian leader is not judged by age or level of knowledge as much as ability to serve as an example of Christian living. To be an example of Christian living, the Christian leader cannot rely on his or her own efforts but must rely upon the grace of God, who is the source of all human gifts.

Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.... Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands of the presbyterate. Be diligent in these matters, be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to everyone. Attend to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in both tasks, for by doing so you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.

—1 Timothy 4:12, 14–18

Reflect

What about St. Timothy's life stands out to you?

As an associate of St. Paul, Timothy was called to help lead the early Christian Church at a young age. This was not always an easy task, and it sometimes meant calling people to task for their inability to follow the Gospel. Timothy's experience reminds us that leadership carries a great responsibility and is not always glamorous.

Who is a leader you admire? Why?

Act

Leaders should strive to keep the Gospel at the forefront of their minds and help make their communities into an image of God's Kingdom. As Timothy demonstrates, there's no age restriction on leadership. Each of us can make important contributions to our schools, parishes and families. In what area of your life can you call greater attention to the Gospel and its values? Remember, it doesn't need to be big. You can begin by thinking small.

St. Thomas Aquinas

- ◆ ca. 1225-1275; Italy
- ◆ Feast Day: January 28
- ◆ Patron Saint of Students and Catholic Universities



Thomas Aquinas was educated at a Benedictine monastery where he encountered the writings of Aristotle, who would come to have great influence on his thought and writings. Despite his time with the Benedictines, Thomas decided that he wanted to join the Dominicans.

His family, who really did not want him to join any religious order, was especially opposed to his interest in the Dominicans. They viewed the order as a group of beggars who were not worthy of Thomas' association. His parents went so far as to send his brothers after him, who locked Thomas in a castle for a year. They even sent a woman to seduce him and try to change his mind. Thomas held firm to his vocation, though. He managed to escape, join the Dominicans and continue his studies.

While in Cologne, Thomas studied under Albert the Great and was ordained a priest. Referring

All I have written seems to me like straw compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me.

to Thomas' large size and quiet demeanor, Albert predicted that someday "the lowing of this dumb ox would be heard all over the world." He was right.

While living a life of prayer and service, Thomas wrote extensive works that covered every area of Christian doctrine. He used Aristotle to present Christianity as a philosophically sound system. He is best known for his *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*, two of the most influential works in theology.

Thomas' work was not immediately accepted. After his death, his writing was closely scrutinized and even condemned. It did not take long, however, for people to realize the greatness of Thomas' work. He was canonized in 1323 and named a Doctor of the Church in 1567.

Christianity is forever indebted to Thomas' courage to pursue his vocation and devotion to a life in service to God. In the end, he came to the humble awareness that God ultimately remains beyond our human knowledge and understanding. We stand in awe of the Mystery.

—St. Thomas Aquinas, after an experience at Mass in December, 1273

Reflect

What about St. Thomas Aquinas' life stands out to you?

Thomas Aquinas was a member of the Dominican order, also known as the Order of Preachers. Among other things, the Dominican Order aims to present the Gospel message in clear ways so that the faithful can better understand its truths.

Can you recall someone whose words or preaching has helped the Gospel come alive for you? A priest, influential teacher or someone else may come to mind. What did they do? How have they helped you better understand the life of God?

Act

Thomas' works are widely read and highly valued for their clarity and insight on complex theological questions. Some of his most famous works, like the *Summa Theologiae*, have a very particular writing style. Aquinas writes questions, imagines possible objections to those questions, and then answers them in the scope of one argument. For Aquinas, dialogue and inquiry are essential to deeper understanding of faith.

What areas of Catholicism are you interested in learning more about? Consider reaching out to a teacher or priest to learn more. Or, organize a group to study a particular topic that interests you. You might even tackle some of Thomas' works.

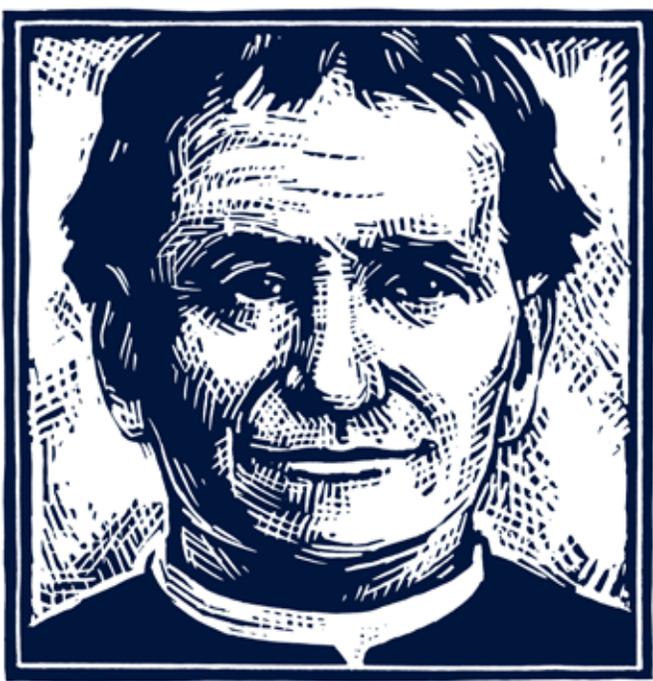
St. John Bosco

- ◆ 1815-1888
- ◆ Feast Day: January 31
- ◆ Patron Saint of Young People, Boys, and Students

His ministry grew so large that he opened a house for boys and founded a religious order named after St. Francis de Sales, known as the Salesians. This order dedicated itself to the education of the poor, and published catechisms and other materials for religious education.

John Bosco's approach to education was quite unique for his time. Instead of insisting upon harsh discipline and physical punishments, he believed that each student ought to be treated as a son or daughter of the teacher. By treating each person with kindness and affection, John knew that the person would be teaching the Gospel not only through the words of the catechism but through actions that imitated Christ's own love.

As a model of faith, John Bosco offers the Church a way of approaching each of our vocations— through the love of Christ. As Christians, our words are certainly important, but we may often teach as much through the kindness and affection that we give to each person that we encounter.



St. John Bosco had a difficult early life. His father died when he was two years old, leaving his mother, Venerable Margaret Bosco, as the sole supporter of the family. Thus, when he was old enough to work, John did various jobs to raise extra money for his family. A performer by nature, John also attended the circus to watch the magicians and would repeat these tricks to audiences of young boys later in the day. During his performance, John would preach the homily he heard earlier from the priest.

In college, John continued to work various jobs supporting his family until he was ordained a priest in 1841. As a priest, he ministered to orphan boys, preparing them for first communion as well as teaching them skills that they needed to obtain a job later in life. His mother Margaret assisted in this work.

There must be no hostility in our minds, no contempt in our eyes, no insult on our lips. We must use mercy for the present and have hope for the future, as is fitting for the true parents who are eager for real correction and improvement. In serious matters it is better to beg God humbly than to send forth a flood of words that will only offend the listeners and have no effect on those who are guilty.

Reflect

What about St. John Bosco's life stands out to you?

John sought to model Christ's love in the Gospel through his emphasis on kindness rather than stringent discipline when teaching. Has the kindness of someone in your life helped you become the person you are today?

Act

John was particularly concerned about orphan and jobless boys who often ended up in prisons. To combat this trend, he provided safe spaces for them to live and taught them usable skills for finding work. These skills helped them to be more independent as they grew older.

Is there a skill or trade you've always wanted to learn? Consider asking someone to help you learn a new skill or take the steps to begin teaching yourself.



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