

# LENT

★ WITH THE

# Saints



WISDOM FROM THE  
CHURCH'S HOLY ONES



## INTRODUCTION

**I**t might seem odd to think about the saints during Lent. After all, we remember them every November, don't we? But the saints are excellent guides for the Lenten journey because, no matter when they lived, they saw the events of their lives in the context of the long-term view—the view toward eternal life. So, whether their suffering, pain, misfortunes, acts of penitence, fasting or prayers lasted 40 days or 40 years, they found joyful purpose in all of it, just as we can today. The saints are not alabaster statues high on a shelf of unattainably perfect living. They were real people like you and me, with their own flaws and imperfections. And because it's easier for others to see the speck in a brother or sister's eye, that makes them perfect for us to study during Lent. Their goodness and their less-than-perfectness can shine a light on our own strengths and weaknesses. The saints can thus walk with us, lovingly nudging us to an awareness of what's drawing us toward or away from our true path. Each day of your Lenten journey, ponder one of the saints here. Take something of his or her story with you as you go about your day. Listen to how God is calling you closer to him during these 40 days and throughout your life.

*Connie Clark*

# St. Joseph

(circa first century A.D.)

St. Joseph is famously silent in the gospels, but his actions give us important clues about the character of the man who raised the Son of God as his own child in first-century Nazareth. Matthew explains Joseph's initial response to the news that his betrothed, Mary, was pregnant, presumably by another man: "Joseph ... since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly" (Matthew 1:19). As a "righteous" man, Joseph followed Mosaic law, which would have condemned Mary to death by public stoning. Yet he did not act in retribution for what he must have assumed was a personal betrayal. Instead, his actions speak of concern for Mary.

We also know that, on three occasions, Joseph drastically changed his life's course to cooperate with God: by taking Mary as his wife, moving his young family to Egypt and then returning to Nazareth. We do not know how or when St. Joseph died, but Church tradition puts his death sometime before Jesus began his public ministry and surrounded in the love and tenderness of Mary and Jesus.

## REFLECTION

*Joseph's decisive actions reflect a deep sense of caring, justice and faithfulness to God's will. Like St. Joseph, we all face difficult decisions. As tempting as it is to say that Joseph was special because he was called by God, the truth is that we are all called to the same holiness. As you begin Lent, look to Joseph to help you decide on your Lenten promises.*

# St. Clare of Assisi

(1194–1253)

Clare knew from childhood that she would devote her life to God, and she was inspired by Francis of Assisi's gospel embrace of poverty. Clare spoke with Francis and another spiritual advisor about how she might develop a similar community for women. On Palm Sunday evening in 1212, Clare and an aunt slipped from her home and walked to a nearby chapel. There, with Francis and his friars as witnesses, Clare dedicated herself to a life of service to God.

Although Clare's father was furious, Clare remained firm. Other women, including Clare's mother and sisters, joined these Poor Ladies of San Damiano, known today as Poor Clares. They lived in poverty, simplicity and seclusion, according to a rule Francis gave them. Although Clare never left her convent, she was a leader within and beyond her community, offering spiritual guidance in letters to popes and royalty. Francis and Clare remained friends until Francis' death. At her death, Clare's last words were, "Blessed be you, O God, for having created me."

## REFLECTION

*Clare was a great contemplative, and her face would become radiant in prayer. She explains contemplation this way: **Place your mind in the mirror of eternity; place your soul in the splendor of glory... transform your entire being into the image of the Divine One himself...***

*Find time during this Lenten season for contemplation, placing your mind and soul in the presence of God.*

# St. John Henry Newman

(1801–1890)

John Henry Newman was a popular Anglican preacher before he converted to Catholicism in 1845. Blessed with a keen intellect and a poet's heart, he wrote more than 40 books, thousands of letters and numerous hymns, including the beloved "Lead, Kindly Light."

The London-born saint was appointed a cardinal in 1879. A champion of an informed Catholic laity, he founded the Catholic University of Ireland (now University College Dublin), where his progressive ideas included launching a series of evening lectures for students who worked during the day.

A few years after Newman's death, a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania read Newman's landmark autobiography, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. He was inspired to form a community where Catholic students could meet and talk about their shared faith. Today, Newman clubs and centers serve the spiritual needs of Catholic students at more than 2,000 public and private colleges and universities in the United States.

## REFLECTION

*Newman's hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light," is a favorite among people of many faiths. It was sung in the concentration camps of the Holocaust, on board the Titanic and at the Western Front during World War I. It was even a favorite of Mahatma Gandhi. In it, Newman speaks of the long night and being far from home. He cannot see the path ahead but asks God's guidance, saying, "one step is enough for me." What is one step that God is asking you to take today to grow closer to him?*

# St. Benedict of Nursia

(circa 480–547)

When Benedict came to Rome as a young man at the turn of the sixth century, the great civilization had already reached its peak and was under threat from within and without. Benedict, disillusioned by the apathy, injustice and greed he saw in this once-great city, retreated to the wilderness to live alone and pray. Word of this counter-culture holy person spread, and together with some followers, Benedict founded the monastery of Monte Cassino in 520.

In the midst of the political and social instability of the crumbling Roman Empire, Benedict sought to create a safe, sacred community, free of unnecessary distractions, with a single goal of finding God.

Benedict created a rule for his monks that encouraged simplicity, gratitude and praise. This Benedictine Rule, which provides a structure of daily prayer, holy reading and work, is the basis of Western monastic life. Although his contemporaries wrote no histories or biographies of Benedict, we have his Rule, and that is enough. According to tradition, St. Benedict foresaw his own death and died on March 21, 547.

## REFLECTION

*With its natural rhythms and time for work, prayer, study, eating and rest, a day in a Benedictine monastery provides a healthy balance for good living. Take a look at the structure of your day today. Is there a healthy balance—with time to serve God, others and yourself? Ask God to help you develop a “rule” for your life that will give you the balance you need to stay close to him.*

# Blessed Charles de Foucauld

(1858–1916)

**P**leasure seeker. Atheist. Soldier. Explorer. Geographer. Priest. Imitator of Christ. Martyr. Charles de Foucauld's life began in Strasbourg, France, where the young orphan was raised by his Catholic grandfather. But he lost his faith as a teen. He joined the French army and went to Algeria, later completing a geographical study of Morocco.

While in the desert, Charles was intrigued by the faith of Muslims. He experienced a profound conversion to Christ and spent several years with the Trappists in Syria and in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. After his ordination to the priesthood, Charles moved to a remote part of French-occupied Algeria, where he lived in prayer and fellowship with the poor. With the outbreak of World War I, even aware of the risks to his own life, Charles remained with his people, who were too poor to move. In 1916, Charles was killed by local factions. He was beatified in 2005.

## REFLECTION

*Pray with Blessed Charles de Foucauld's prayer of abandonment:*

*Father, I abandon myself into your hands. Do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you; I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures. I wish no more than this, O Lord. Into your hands I commend my soul. I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord... I surrender myself into your hands without reserve and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father.*

# St. Monica

(circa 331–387)

Augustine was making plans to move from his home in North Africa to Rome. But knowing that his mother opposed the idea, the 29-year-old teacher set sail without telling her. Monica was heartbroken. It was another in a long string of rejections by her son, including fathering a child out of wedlock and joining a cult. Knowing her son's soul was in danger, she sailed after him to Rome, where she met the great bishop and future saint, Ambrose. She spoke to him about the wayward Augustine.

Ambrose is said to have told her, “Speak less to Augustine about God and more to God about Augustine.”

Monica took his advice and prayed nearly unceasingly for God to move her son's heart. After 17 years of resistance, Augustine was baptized at Easter in 387. He went on to become one of the Church's greatest theologians. Monica died shortly after Augustine's baptism. In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes that, before his mother died, she told him, “Son ... what I want here further, and why I am here, I know not, now that my hopes in this world are satisfied.”

## REFLECTION

*We might cringe at interfering Monica, but she reminds us that we all make mistakes with our loved ones. Like Monica, however, we can always trust in God and his plan. Today, spend time in conversation with God about your loved ones who are in need of his help.*

# Blessed Solanus Casey

(1870–1957)

**B**arney Casey was a streetcar operator when he witnessed a violent murder that caused him to rethink his life. He enrolled in the seminary but quickly discovered that classes were offered in German and Latin, and he spoke neither language. Praying before a statue of Mary, he heard an interior voice say, “Go to Detroit.” Leaving his family home in Wisconsin, he applied to the Capuchin Order of Friars in Detroit, Michigan.

Although he struggled with his studies, he was ordained a “simplex” priest, a classification that no longer exists but restricted him from preaching about Church doctrine and from hearing confessions. He was given tasks usually assigned to novices, including doorkeeper. But Father Solanus took exceptional pride in his work. It was at the door of the Detroit monastery that he became a much-loved counselor. People lined up for blocks for a moment with this “reader of souls.” His healing prayer services resulted in miraculous cures, where his thin, wispy voice could be heard speaking his constant refrain: “Thank God ahead of time.”

## REFLECTION

*Blessed Solanus lived a life of gratitude and joy. He said that gratitude was “the first sign of a thinking, rational creature.” Today, and every day of Lent, begin your prayers by mentally listing some of the gifts God has given you.*

# LENT ★ WITH THE Saints

*Lent with the Saints* gives us the opportunity to allow a bright and shining light to guide us on our Lenten journey. Learning about their exemplary lives, we are emboldened each day by the examples of the saints, the “Church’s holy ones.” Reading about and reflecting on the often difficult, but ultimately joy-filled lives of the saints helps us to join in their joy and love for the Lord. Spend Lent “with the Saints” and continue on toward a more holy Easter Season!

This book, along with many other *Creative Communications for the Parish* products, is available on **amazon**kindle and **nook**by Barnes & Noble

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