



Call to Holiness

April 2014

Bulletin Supplement

Catholic saints are holy people and human people who lived extraordinary lives. Each saint the Church honors responded to God's invitation to use his or her unique gifts. God calls each one of us to be a saint.

*April 1: **Saint Hugh of Grenoble** (1052-1132)*

Today's saint could be a patron for those of us who feel so overwhelmed by all the problems in the world that we do not know where to begin. Hugh, who served as a bishop in France for 52 years, had his work cut out for him from the start. Corruption seemed to loom in every direction: the buying and selling of Church offices, violations of clerical celibacy, lay control of Church property, religious indifference and/or ignorance. After serving as bishop for two years, he had his fill. He tried disappearing to a monastery, but the pope called him back to continue the work of reform. Ironically, Hugh was reasonably effective in the role of reformer surely because of his devotion to the Church but also because of his strong character. In conflicts between Church and state he was an unflinching defender of the Church. He fearlessly supported the papacy. He was eloquent as a preacher. He restored his own cathedral, made civic improvements in the town and weathered a brief exile. Hugh may be best known as patron and benefactor of St. Bruno, founder of the Carthusian Order. Hugh died in 1132. He was canonized only two years later.



*April 2: **Saint Francis of Paola** (1416-1507)*

Francis of Paola was a man who deeply loved contemplative solitude and wished only to be the "least in the household of God." Yet, when the Church called him to active service in the world, he became a miracle-worker and influenced the course of nations. After accompanying his parents on a pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi, he began to live as a contemplative hermit in a remote cave near Paola, on Italy's southern seacoast. Before he was 20, he received the first followers who had come to imitate his way of life. Seventeen years later, when his disciples had grown in number, Francis established a Rule for his austere community and sought Church approval. This was the founding of the Hermits of St. Francis of Assisi, who were approved by the Holy See in 1474. In 1492, Francis changed the name of his community to "Minims" because he wanted them to be known as the least (minimi) in the household of God. Humility was to be the hallmark of the brothers as it had been in Francis's



personal life. Besides the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, Francis enjoined upon his followers the fourth obligation of a perpetual Lenten fast. He felt that heroic mortification was necessary as a means for spiritual growth.

It was Francis's desire to be a contemplative hermit, yet he believed that God was calling him to the apostolic life. He began to use the gifts he had received, such as the gifts of miracles and prophecy, to minister to the people of God. A defender of the poor and oppressed, Francis incurred the wrath of King Ferdinand of Naples for the admonitions he directed toward the king and his sons. Following the request of Pope Sixtus IV, Francis traveled to Paris to help Louis XI of France prepare for his death. While ministering to the king, Francis was able to influence the course of national politics. He helped to restore peace between France and Brittany by advising a marriage between the ruling families, and between France and Spain by persuading Louis XI to return some disputed land. Francis died while at the French court.

*April 3: **Saint Benedict the African** (1526-1589)*

Benedict held important posts in the Franciscan Order and gracefully adjusted to other work when his terms of office were up. His parents were slaves brought from Africa to Messina, Sicily. Freed at 18, Benedict did farm work for a wage and soon saved enough to buy a pair of oxen. He was very proud of those animals. In time he joined a group of hermits around Palermo and was eventually recognized as their leader. Because these hermits followed the Rule of St. Francis, Pope Pius IV ordered them to join the First Order. Benedict was eventually novice master and then guardian of the friars in Palermo— positions rarely held in those days by a brother. In fact, Benedict was forced to accept his election as guardian. And when his term ended he happily returned to his work in the friary kitchen. Benedict corrected the friars with humility and charity. Once he corrected a novice and assigned him a penance only to learn that the novice was not the guilty party. Benedict immediately knelt down before the novice and asked his pardon. In later life Benedict was not possessive of the few things he used. He never referred to them as "mine" but always called them "ours." His gifts for prayer and the guidance of souls earned him throughout Sicily a reputation for holiness. Following the example of St. Francis, Benedict kept seven 40-day fasts throughout the year; he also slept only a few hours each night. After Benedict's death, King Philip III of Spain paid for a special tomb for this holy friar. Canonized in 1807, he is honored as a patron saint by African-Americans.



*April 4: **Saint Isidore of Seville** (560?-636)*

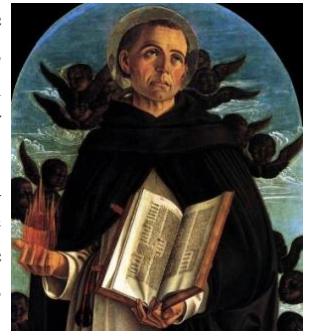


The 76 years of Isidore's life were a time of conflict and growth for the Church in Spain. The Visigoths had invaded the land a century and a half earlier, and shortly before Isidore's birth they set up their own capital. They were Arian Christians who said Christ was not God. Thus Spain was split in two: One people (Catholic Romans) struggled with another (Arian Goths). Isidore reunited Spain, making it a center of culture and learning. The country served as a teacher and guide for other European countries whose culture was also threatened by barbarian invaders. Born in Cartagena of a family that included three other sibling saints (Leander, Fulgentius and Florentina), he was educated (severely) by his elder brother, whom he succeeded as bishop of Seville. An amazingly learned man, he was sometimes called "The Schoolmaster of the Middle Ages" because the encyclopedia he wrote was used as a textbook for nine centuries. He required seminaries to be built in every diocese, wrote a Rule for religious orders and founded schools that taught every branch of learning. Isidore wrote numerous books, including a dictionary, an encyclopedia, a history of Goths and a history of the world beginning with creation! He completed the Mozarabic liturgy, which is still in use in Toledo, Spain. For all these reasons, Isidore has been suggested as patron of the Internet. Several others (including Anthony of Padua) have also been suggested. He continued his austerities even as he approached 80. During the last six months of his life, he increased his charities so much that his house was crowded from morning till night with the poor of the countryside.

*April 5: **Saint Vincent Ferrer** (1350?-1419)*

The polarization in the Church today is a mild breeze compared with the tornado that ripped the Church apart during the lifetime of this saint. If any saint is a patron of reconciliation, Vincent Ferrer is. Despite parental opposition, he entered the Dominican Order in his native Spain at 19. After brilliant

studies, he was ordained a priest by Cardinal Peter de Luna who would figure tragically in his life. Of a very ardent nature, Vincent practiced the austerities of his Order with great energy. He was chosen prior of the Dominican house in Valencia shortly after his ordination. The Western Schism divided Christianity first between two, then three, popes. Clement VII lived at Avignon in France, Urban VI in Rome. Vincent was convinced the election of Urban was invalid though Catherine of Siena (April 29) was just as devoted a supporter of the Roman pope. In the service of Cardinal de Luna, Vincent worked to persuade Spaniards to follow Clement. When Clement died, Cardinal de Luna was elected at Avignon and became Benedict XIII.



Vincent worked for him as apostolic penitentiary and Master of the Sacred Palace. But the new pope did not resign as all candidates in the conclave had sworn to do. He remained stubborn despite being deserted by the French king and nearly all of the cardinals. Vincent became disillusioned and very ill, but finally took up the work of simply "going through the world preaching Christ," though he felt that any renewal in the Church depended on healing the schism. An eloquent and fiery preacher, he spent the last 20 years of his life spreading the Good News in Spain, France, Switzerland, the Low Countries and Lombardy, stressing the need of repentance and the fear of coming judgment. (He became known as the "Angel of the Judgment.") He tried, unsuccessfully, in 1408 and 1415, to persuade his former friend to resign. He finally concluded that Benedict was not the true pope. Though very ill, he mounted the pulpit before an assembly over which Benedict himself was presiding and thundered his denunciation of the man who had ordained him a priest. Benedict fled for his life, abandoned by those who had formerly supported him. Strangely, Vincent had no part in the Council of Constance, which ended the schism.

April 6: Saint Crescentia Hoess (1682-1744)



Crescentia was born in 1682 in a little town near Augsburg, the daughter of a poor weaver. She spent play time praying in the parish church, assisted those even poorer than herself and had so mastered the truths of her religion that she was permitted to make her holy Communion at the then unusually early age of seven. In the town she was called "the little angel." As she grew older she desired to enter the convent of the Tertiaries of St. Francis. But the convent was poor and, because Crescentia had no dowry, the superiors refused her admission. Her case was then pleaded by the Protestant mayor of the town to whom the convent owed a favor. The community felt it was forced into receiving her, and her new life was made miserable. She was considered a burden and assigned nothing other than menial tasks. Even her cheerful spirit was misinterpreted as flattery or hypocrisy. Conditions improved four years later when a new superior was elected who realized her virtue. Crescentia herself was appointed mistress of novices. She so won the love and respect of the sisters that, upon the death of the superior, Crescentia herself was unanimously elected to that position. Under her the financial state of the convent improved and her reputation in spiritual matters spread. She was soon being consulted by princes and princesses as well as by bishops and cardinals seeking her advice. And yet, a true daughter of Francis, she remained ever humble.

Bodily afflictions and pain were always with her. First it was headaches and toothaches. Then she lost the ability to walk, her hands and feet gradually becoming so crippled that her body curled up into a fetal position. In the spirit of Francis she cried out, "Oh, you bodily members, praise God that he

has given you the capacity to suffer." Despite her sufferings she was filled with peace and joy as she died on Easter Sunday in 1744. She was beatified in 1900 and canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2001.

*April 7: **Saint John Baptist de la Salle** (1651-1719)*



Complete dedication to what he saw as God's will for him dominated the life of John Baptist de la Salle. In 1950, Pope Pius XII named him patron of schoolteachers for his efforts in upgrading school instruction. As a young 17th-century Frenchman, John had everything going for him: scholarly bent, good looks, noble family background, money, refined upbringing. At the early age of 11, he received the tonsure and started preparation for the priesthood, to which he was ordained at 27. He seemed assured then of a life of dignified ease and a high position in the Church. But God had other plans for John, which were gradually revealed to him in the next several years. During a chance meeting with M. Nyel of Raven, he became interested in the creation of schools for poor boys in Raven, where he was stationed. Though the work was extremely distasteful to him at first, he became more involved in working with the deprived youths. Once convinced that this was his divinely appointed mission, John threw himself wholeheartedly into the work, left home and family, abandoned his position as canon at Rheims, gave away his fortune and reduced himself to the level of the poor to whom he devoted his entire life.

The remainder of his life was closely entwined with the community of religious men he founded, the Brothers of the Christian School (Christian Brothers, or De La Salle Brothers). This community grew rapidly and was successful in educating boys of poor families, using methods designed by John. It prepared teachers in the first training college for teachers and also set up homes and schools for young delinquents of wealthy families. The motivating element in all these endeavors was the desire to become a good Christian. Yet even in his success, John did not escape experiencing many trials: heartrending disappointment and defections among his disciples, bitter opposition from the secular schoolmasters who resented his new and fruitful methods, and persistent opposition from the Jansenists of his time, whose moral rigidity and pessimism about the human condition. John resisted vehemently all his life. Afflicted with asthma and rheumatism in his last years, he died on Good Friday at 68 and was canonized in 1900.

*April 8: **Saint Julie Billiart** (1751-1816)*

Born in Cuvilly, France, into a family of well-to-do farmers, young Marie Rose Julie Billiart showed an early interest in religion and in helping the sick and poor. Though the first years of her life were relatively peaceful and uncomplicated, Julie had to take up manual work as a young teen when her family lost its money. However, she spent her spare time teaching catechism to young people and to the farm laborers. A mysterious illness overtook her when she was about 30. Witnessing an attempt to wound or even kill her father, Julie was paralyzed and became a complete invalid. For the next two decades she continued to teach catechism lessons from her bed, offered spiritual advice and attracted visitors who had heard of her holiness. When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, revolutionary forces became aware of her allegiance to fugitive priests. With the help of friends she was smuggled out of Cuvilly in a haycart; she spent several years hiding in Compiègne, being moved from house to house despite her growing physical pain. She even lost the power of speech for a time.



But this period also proved to be a fruitful spiritual time for Julie. It was at this time she had a vision in which she saw Calvary surrounded by women in religious habits and heard a voice saying, "Behold these spiritual daughters whom I give you in an Institute marked by the cross." As time passed and Julie continued her mobile life, she made the acquaintance of an aristocratic woman, Françoise Blin de Bourdon, who shared Julie's interest in teaching the faith. In 1803 the two women began the Institute of Notre Dame, which was dedicated to the education of the poor as well as young Christian girls and the training of catechists. The following year the first Sisters of Notre Dame made their vows. That was the same year that Julie recovered from the illness: She was able to walk for the first time in 22 years. Though Julie had always been attentive to the special needs of the poor and that always remained her priority, she also became aware that other classes in society needed Christian instruction. From the founding of the Sisters of Notre Dame until her death, Julie was on the road, opening a variety of schools in France and Belgium that served the poor and the wealthy, vocational groups, teachers. Ultimately, Julie and Françoise moved the motherhouse to Namur, Belgium. Julie died there in 1816. She was canonized in 1969.

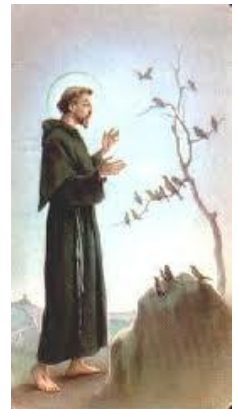
*April 9: **Saint Casilda** (11th century)*



Some saints' names are far more familiar to us than others, but even the lives of obscure holy persons teach us something. And so it is with St. Casilda, the daughter of a Muslim leader in Toledo, Spain, in the 10th century. Casilda was herself raised as a Muslim and showed special kindness to Christian prisoners. She became ill as a young woman but was not convinced that any of the local Arab doctors could cure her. So, she made a pilgrimage to the shrine of San Vincenzo in northern Spain. Like so many other people who made their way there—many of them suffering from hemorrhages—Casilda sought the healing waters of the shrine. We're uncertain what brought her to the shrine, but we do know that she left it relieved of illness. In response, she became a Christian and lived a life of solitude and penance not far from the miraculous spring. It's said that she lived to be 100 years old. Her death likely occurred around the year 1050. Tensions between Muslims and Christians have often existed throughout history, sometimes resulting in bloody conflict. Through her quiet, simple life Casilda served her Creator—first in one faith, then another.

*April 10: **Blessed James Oldo** (1364-1404)*

You have heard rags-to-riches stories. Today, we celebrate the reverse. James of Oldo was born into a well-to-do family near Milan in 1364. He married a woman who, like him, appreciated the comforts that came with wealth. But an outbreak of plague drove James, his wife and their three children out of their home and into the countryside. Despite those precautions, two of his daughters died from the plague, James determined to use whatever time he had left to build up treasures in heaven and to build God's realm on earth. He and his wife became Secular Franciscans. James gave up his old lifestyle and did penance for his sins. He cared for a sick priest, who taught him Latin. Upon the death of his wife, James himself became a priest. His house was transformed into a chapel where small groups of people, many of them fellow Secular Franciscans, came for prayer and support. James focused on caring for the sick and for prisoners of war. He died in 1404 after contracting a disease from one of his patients. James Oldo was beatified in 1933.



*April 11: **Saint Stanislaus** (1030-1079)*



Anyone who reads the history of Eastern Europe cannot help but chance on the name of Stanislaus, the saintly but tragic bishop of Kraków, patron of Poland. He is remembered with Saints Thomas More (June 22) and Thomas Becket (December 29) for vigorous opposition to the evils of an unjust government. Born in Szczepanow near Kraków on July 26, 1030, he was ordained a priest after being educated in the cathedral schools of Gniezno, then capital of Poland, and at Paris. He was appointed preacher and archdeacon to the bishop of Kraków, where his eloquence and example brought about real conversion in many of his penitents, both clergy and laity. He became bishop of Kraków in 1072. During an expedition against the Grand Duchy of Kiev, Stanislaus became involved in the political situation of Poland. Known for his outspokenness, he aimed his attacks at the evils of the peasantry and the king, especially the unjust wars and immoral acts of King Boleslaus II.

The king first excused himself, then made a show of penance, then relapsed into his old ways. Stanislaus continued his open opposition in spite of charges of treason and threats of death, finally excommunicating the king. The latter, enraged, ordered soldiers to kill the bishop. When they refused, the king killed him with his own hands. Forced to flee to Hungary, Boleslaus supposedly spent the rest of his life as a penitent in the Benedictine abbey in Osiak.

*April 12: **Saint Teresa of Los Andes** (1900-1920)*

One need not live a long life to leave a deep imprint. Teresa of Los Andes is proof of that. As a young girl growing up in Santiago, Chile, in the early 1900s, she read an autobiography of a French-born saint, popularly known as the Little Flower. The experience deepened her desire to serve God and clarified the path she would follow. At age 19 she became a Carmelite nun, taking the name of Teresa. The convent offered the simple lifestyle Teresa desired and the joy of living in a community of women completely devoted to God. She focused her days on prayer and sacrifice. I am God's, she wrote in her diary. He created me and is my beginning and my end. • Toward the end of her short life, Teresa began an apostolate of letter-writing, sharing her thoughts on the spiritual life with many people. At age 20 she contracted typhus and quickly took her final vows. She died a short time later, during Holy Week. Teresa remains popular with the estimated 100,000 pilgrims who visit her shrine in Los Andes each year. She is Chile's first saint.



*April 13: **Saint Martin I** (d. 655)*



When Martin I became pope in 649, Constantinople was the capital of the Byzantine empire and the patriarch of Constantinople was the most influential Church leader in the eastern Christian world. The struggles that existed within the Church at that time were magnified by the close cooperation of emperor and patriarch. A teaching, strongly supported in the East, held that Christ had no human will. Twice emperors had officially favored this position, Heraclius by publishing a formula of faith and Constans II by silencing the issue of one or two wills in Christ. Shortly after assuming the office of the papacy (which he did without first being confirmed by the emperor), Martin held a council at the Lateran in which the imperial documents were censured, and in which the patriarch of Constantinople

and two of his predecessors were condemned. Constans II, in response, tried first to turn bishops and people against the pope.

Failing in this and in an attempt to kill the pope, the emperor sent troops to Rome to seize Martin and to bring him back to Constantinople. Already in poor health, Martin offered no resistance, returned with the exarch Calliopas and was then submitted to various imprisonments, tortures and hardships. Although condemned to death and with some of the torture imposed already carried out, Martin was saved from execution by the pleas of a repentant Paul, patriarch of Constantinople, who was himself gravely ill. Martin died shortly thereafter, tortures and cruel treatment having taken their toll. He is the last of the early popes to be venerated as a martyr.

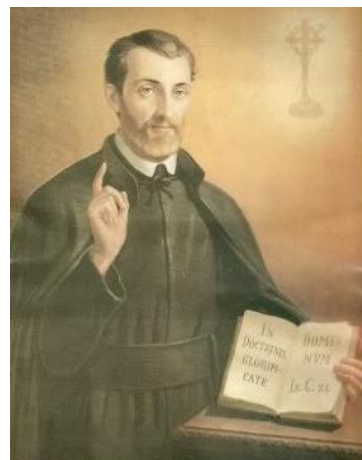
April 14: Blessed Peter Gonzalez (d. 1246)

St. Paul had a conversion experience on the road to Damascus. Many years later, the same proved true for Peter Gonzalez, who triumphantly rode his horse into the Spanish city of Astorga in the 13th century to take up an important post at the cathedral. The animal stumbled and fell, leaving Peter in the mud and onlookers amused. Humbled, Peter reevaluated his motivations (his bishop-uncle had secured the cathedral post for him) and started down a new path. He became a Dominican priest and proved to be a most effective preacher. He spent much of his time as court chaplain, and attempted to exert positive influence on the behavior of members of the court. After King Ferdinand III and his troops defeated the Moors at Cordoba, Peter was successful in restraining the soldiers from pillaging and persuaded the king to treat the defeated Moors with compassion. After retiring from the court, Peter devoted the remainder of his life to preaching in northwest Spain. He developed a special mission to Spanish and Portuguese seamen. He is the patron of sailors. Peter Gonzalez died in 1246 and was beatified in 1741.



April 15: Blessed Caesar de Bus (1544-1607)

Like so many of us, Caesar de Bus struggled with the decision about what to do with his life. After completing his Jesuit education he had difficulty settling between a military and a literary career. He wrote some plays but ultimately settled for life in the army and at court. For a time life was going rather smoothly for the engaging, well-to-do young Frenchman. He was confident he had made the right choice. That was until he saw firsthand the realities of battle, including the St. Bartholomew's Day massacres of French Protestants in 1572. He fell seriously ill and found himself reviewing his priorities, including his spiritual life. By the time he had recovered, Caesar had resolved to become a priest. Following his ordination in 1582, he undertook special pastoral work: teaching the catechism to ordinary people living in neglected, rural, out-of-the-way places. His efforts were badly needed and well received.



Working with his cousin, Caesar developed a program of family catechesis. The goal—to ward off heresy among the people—met the approval of local bishops. Out of these efforts grew a new religious congregation: the Fathers of Christian Doctrine. One of Caesar's works, *Instructions for the Family on the Four Parts of the Roman Catechism*, was published 60 years after his death. He was beatified in 1975.

*April 16: **Saint Bernadette Soubirous** (1844-1879)*

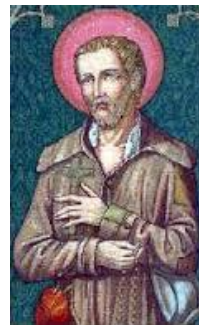


Bernadette Soubirous was born in 1844, the first child of an extremely poor miller in the town of Lourdes in southern France. The family was living in the basement of a dilapidated building when on February 11, 1858, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette in a cave above the banks of the Gave River near Lourdes. Bernadette, 14 years old, was known as a virtuous girl though a dull student who had not even made her first Holy Communion. In poor health, she had suffered from asthma from an early age. There were 18 appearances in all, the final one occurring on the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, July 16. Although Bernadette's initial reports provoked skepticism, her daily visions of "the Lady" brought great crowds of the curious. The Lady, Bernadette explained, had instructed her to have a chapel built on the spot of the visions. There the people were to come to wash in and drink of the water of the spring that had welled up from the very spot where Bernadette had been instructed to dig. According to Bernadette, the Lady of her visions was a girl of 16 or 17 who wore a white robe with a blue sash. Yellow roses covered her feet, a large rosary was on her right arm. In the vision on March 25 she told Bernadette, "I am the Immaculate Conception." It was only when the words were explained to her that Bernadette came to realize who the Lady was.

Few visions have ever undergone the scrutiny that these appearances of the Immaculate Virgin were subject to. Lourdes became one of the most popular Marian shrines in the world, attracting millions of visitors. Miracles were reported at the shrine and in the waters of the spring. After thorough investigation Church authorities confirmed the authenticity of the apparitions in 1862. During her life Bernadette suffered much. She was hounded by the public as well as by civic officials until at last she was protected in a convent of nuns. Five years later she petitioned to enter the Sisters of Notre Dame. After a period of illness she was able to make the journey from Lourdes and enter the novitiate. But within four months of her arrival she was given the last rites of the Church and allowed to profess her vows. She recovered enough to become infirmarian and then sacristan, but chronic health problems persisted. She died on April 16, 1879, at the age of 35. She was canonized in 1933.

*April 17: **Saint Benedict Joseph Labre** (d. 1783)*

Benedict Joseph Labre was truly eccentric, one of God's special little ones. Born in France and the eldest of 18 children, he studied under his uncle, a parish priest. Because of poor health and a lack of suitable academic preparation he was unsuccessful in his attempts to enter the religious life. Then, at 16 years of age, a profound change took place. Benedict lost his desire to study and gave up all thoughts of the priesthood, much to the consternation of his relatives. He became a pilgrim, traveling from one great shrine to another, living off alms. He wore the rags of a beggar and shared his food with the poor. Filled with the love of God and neighbor, Benedict had special devotion to the Blessed Mother and to the Blessed Sacrament. In Rome, where he lived in the Colosseum for a time, he was called "the poor man of the Forty Hours Devotion" and "the beggar of Rome." The people accepted his ragged appearance better than he did. His excuse to himself was that "our comfort is not in this world."



On the last day of his life, April 16, 1783, Benedict Joseph dragged himself to a church in Rome and prayed there for two hours before he collapsed, dying peacefully in a nearby house. Immediately after his death the people proclaimed him a saint. He was officially proclaimed a saint by Pope Leo XIII at canonization ceremonies in 1883.

April 18: Blessed Marie of the Incarnation (1566-1618)



Blessed Marie of the Incarnation was the daughter of a French government official named Nicholas Aurillot. Educated at her aunt's convent at Longchamps. Though attracted to religious life, she married Pierre Acarie, an aristocrat and treasury official, at age 16. Mother of six, three of whom became Carmelites, and one a priest. Peter supported the Catholic League against Henry IV. When Henry became king he seized the Acarie estates, impoverished the family, and exiled them from Paris. Barbara went to court over the matter, won, and reclaimed part of the family fortune. She was devoted to the writings of Saint Teresa of Avila, and became active in charities. Her good works eventually won her the admiration and support of King Henry. Brought the Discalced Carmelites of Saint Teresa to France, founding five houses between 1604 and 1609. Widowed at 47. Carmelite lay sister in 1613 at Amiens, France, taking the name Mary of the Incarnation. Spiritual student of Saint Francis de Sales. She was known for receiving visions and ecstasies, and for supernatural gifts.

April 19: Blessed Luchesio and Buonadonna (d. 1260)

Luchesio and his wife Buonadonna wanted to follow St. Francis as a married couple. Thus they set in motion the Secular Franciscan Order. Luchesio and Buonadonna lived in Poggibonzi where he was a greedy merchant. Meeting Francis—probably in 1213—changed his life. He began to perform many works of charity. At first Buonadonna was not as enthusiastic about giving so much away as Luchesio was. One day after complaining that he was giving everything to strangers, Buonadonna answered the door only to find someone else needing help. Luchesio asked her to give the poor man some bread. She frowned but went to the pantry anyway. There she discovered more bread than had been there the last time she looked. She soon became as zealous for a poor and simple life as Luchesio was. They sold the business, farmed enough land to provide for their needs and distributed the rest to the poor.



In the 13th century some couples, by mutual consent and with the Church's permission, separated so that the husband could join a monastery (or a group such as Francis began) and his wife could go to a cloister. Conrad of Piacenza and his wife did just that. This choice existed for childless couples or for those whose children had already grown up. Luchesio and Buonadonna wanted another alternative, a way of sharing in religious life, but outside the cloister. To meet this desire, Francis set up the Secular Franciscan Order. Francis wrote a simple Rule for the Third Order (Secular Franciscans) at first; Pope Honorius III approved a more formally worded Rule in 1221. The charity of Luchesio drew the poor to him, and, like many other saints, he and Buonadonna seemed never to lack the resources to help these people. One day Luchesio was carrying a crippled man he had found on the road. A frivolous young man came up and asked, "What poor devil is that you are carrying there on your back?" "I am carrying my Lord Jesus Christ," responded Luchesio. The young man immediately begged Luchesio's pardon. Luchesio and Buonadonna both died on April 28, 1260. He was beatified in 1273. Local tradition referred to Buonadonna as "blessed" though the title was not given officially.

April 20: St. Conrad of Parzham (1818-1894)

Conrad spent most of his life as porter in Altoetting, Bavaria, letting people into the friary and indirectly encouraging them to let God into their lives. His parents, Bartholomew and Gertrude Birndorfer, lived near Parzham, Bavaria. In those days this region was recovering from the Napoleonic wars. A lover of solitary prayer and a peacemaker as a young man, Conrad joined the Capuchins as a



brother. He made his profession in 1852 and was assigned to the friary in Altoetting. That city's shrine to Mary was very popular; at the nearby Capuchin friary there was a lot of work for the porter, a job Conrad held for 41 years. At first some of the other friars were jealous that such a young friar held this important job. Conrad's patience and holy life overcame their doubts. As porter he dealt with many people, obtaining many of the friary supplies and generously providing for the poor who came to the door. He treated them all with the courtesy Francis expected of his followers.

Conrad's helpfulness was sometimes unnerving. Once Father Vincent, seeking quiet to prepare a sermon, went up the belltower of the church. Conrad tracked him down when someone wanting to go to confession specifically requested Father Vincent. Conrad also developed a special rapport with the children of the area. He enthusiastically promoted the Seraphic Work of Charity, which aided neglected children. Conrad spent hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. He regularly asked the Blessed Mother to intercede for him and for the many people he included in his prayers. The ever-patient Conrad was canonized in 1934.

April 21: Saint Anselm (1033-1109)

Indifferent toward religion as a young man, Anselm became one of the Church's greatest theologians and leaders. He received the title "Father of Scholasticism" for his attempt to analyze and illumine the truths of faith through the aid of reason. At 15, Anselm wanted to enter a monastery, but was refused acceptance because of his father's opposition. Twelve years later, after careless disinterest in religion and years of worldly living, he finally fulfilled his desire to be a monk. He entered the monastery of Bec in Normandy, three years later was elected prior and 15 years later was unanimously chosen abbot. Considered an original and independent thinker, Anselm was admired for his patience, gentleness and teaching skill. Under his leadership, the abbey of Bec became a monastic school, influential in philosophical and theological studies.

During these years, at the community's request, Anselm began publishing his theological works, comparable to those of St. Augustine (August 28). His best-known work is the book *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God Became Man"). At 60, against his will, Anselm was appointed archbishop of Canterbury in 1093. His appointment was opposed at first by England's King William Rufus and later accepted. Rufus persistently refused to cooperate with efforts to reform the Church. Anselm finally went into voluntary exile until Rufus died in 1100. He was then recalled to England by Rufus's brother and successor, Henry I. Disagreeing fearlessly with Henry over the king's insistence on investing England's bishops, Anselm spent another three years in exile in Rome. His care and concern extended to the very poorest people; he opposed the slave trade. Anselm obtained from the national council at Westminster the passage of a resolution prohibiting the sale of human beings.



*April 22: **Saint Adalbert of Prague** (956-97)*



Opposition to the Good News of Jesus did not discourage Adalbert, who is now remembered with great honor in the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Germany. Born to a noble family in Bohemia, he received part of his education from St. Adalbert of Magdeburg. At the age of 27 he was chosen as bishop of Prague. Those who resisted his program of clerical reform forced him into exile eight years later. In time, the people of Prague requested his return as their bishop. Within a short time, however, he was exiled again after excommunicating those who violated the right of sanctuary by dragging a woman accused of adultery from a church and murdering her. After a short ministry in Hungary, he went to preach the Good News to people living near the Baltic Sea. He and two companions were martyred by pagan priests in that region. Adalbert's body was immediately ransomed and buried in Gniezno cathedral (Poland). In the mid-11th century his relics were moved to St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague.

*April 23: **Saint George** (d. c. 303)*

If Mary Magdalene was the victim of misunderstanding, George is the object of a vast amount of imagination. There is every reason to believe that he was a real martyr who suffered at Lydda in Palestine, probably before the time of Constantine. The Church adheres to his memory, but not to the legends surrounding his life. That he was willing to pay the supreme price to follow Christ is what the Church believes. And it is enough. The story of George's slaying the dragon, rescuing the king's daughter and converting Libya is a 12th-century Italian fable. George was a favorite patron saint of crusaders, as well as of Eastern soldiers in earlier times. He is a patron saint of England, Portugal, Germany, Aragon, Catalonia, Genoa and Venice.



*April 24: **Saint Fidelis of Sigmaringen** (1577-1622)*

If a poor man needed some clothing, Fidelis would often give the man the clothes right off his back. Complete generosity to others characterized this saint's life.

Born in 1577, Mark Rey (Fidelis was his religious name) became a lawyer who constantly upheld the causes of the poor and oppressed people. Nicknamed "the poor man's lawyer," Fidelis soon grew disgusted with the corruption and injustice he saw among his colleagues. He left his law career to become a priest, joining his brother George as a member of the Capuchin Order. His wealth was divided between needy seminarians and the poor.

As a follower of Francis, Fidelis continued his devotion to the weak and needy. During a severe epidemic in a city where he was guardian of a friary, Fidelis cared for and cured many sick soldiers.



He was appointed head of a group of Capuchins sent to preach against the Calvinists and Zwinglians in Switzerland. Almost certain violence threatened. Those who observed the mission felt that success was more attributable to the prayer of Fidelis during the night than to his sermons and instructions.

He was accused of opposing the peasants' national aspirations for independence from Austria. While he was preaching at Seewis, to which he had gone against the advice of his friends, a gun was

fired at him, but he escaped unharmed. A Protestant offered to shelter Fidelis, but he declined, saying his life was in God's hands. On the road back, he was set upon by a group of armed men and killed.

He was canonized in 1746. Fifteen years later, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, which was established in 1622, recognized him as its first martyr.

April 25: Saint Mark

Most of what we know about Mark comes directly from the New Testament. He is usually identified with the Mark of Acts 12:12. (When Peter escaped from prison, he went to the home of Mark's mother.) Paul and Barnabas took him along on the first missionary journey, but for some reason Mark returned alone to Jerusalem. It is evident, from Paul's refusal to let Mark accompany him on the second journey despite Barnabas's insistence, that Mark had displeased Paul. Because Paul later asks Mark to visit him in prison, we may assume the trouble did not last long.

The oldest and the shortest of the four Gospels, the Gospel of Mark emphasizes Jesus' rejection by humanity while being God's triumphant envoy. Probably written for Gentile converts in Rome—after the death of Peter and Paul sometime between A.D. 60 and 70—Mark's Gospel is the gradual manifestation of a "scandal": a crucified Messiah. Evidently a friend of Mark (Peter called him "my son"), Peter is only one of the Gospel sources, others being the Church in Jerusalem (Jewish roots) and the Church at Antioch (largely Gentile).

Like one other Gospel writer, Luke, Mark was not one of the 12 apostles. We cannot be certain whether he knew Jesus personally. Some scholars feel that the evangelist is speaking of himself when describing the arrest of Jesus in Gethsemane: "Now a young man followed him wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body. They seized him, but he left the cloth behind and ran off naked" (Mark 14:51-52). Others hold Mark to be the first bishop of Alexandria, Egypt. Venice, famous for the Piazza San Marco, claims Mark as its patron saint; the large basilica there is believed to contain his remains. A winged lion is Mark's symbol. The lion derives from Mark's description of John the Baptist as a "voice of one crying out in the desert" (Mark 1:3), which artists compared to a roaring lion. The wings come from the application of Ezekiel's vision of four winged creatures (Ezekiel, chapter one) to the evangelists.



April 26: Saint Pedro de San José Betancur (1626-1667)

Central America claimed its first saint with the canonization of Pedro de San José Betancur by Pope John Paul II in Guatemala City on July 30, 2002. Known as the "St. Francis of the Americas," Pedro de Betancur is the first saint to have worked and died in Guatemala.

Calling the new saint an "outstanding example" of Christian mercy, the Holy Father noted that St. Pedro practiced mercy "heroically with the lowliest and the most deprived." Speaking to the estimated 500,000 Guatemalans in attendance, the Holy Father spoke of the social ills that plague the country today and of the need for change. "Let us think of the children and young people who are homeless or deprived of an education; of abandoned women with their many needs; of the hordes of social outcasts who live in the cities; of the victims of organized crime,



of prostitution or of drugs; of the sick who are neglected and the elderly who live in loneliness,” he said in his homily during the three-hour liturgy.

Pedro very much wanted to become a priest, but God had other plans for the young man born into a poor family on Tenerife in the Canary Islands. Pedro was a shepherd until age 24, when he began to make his way to Guatemala, hoping to connect with a relative engaged in government service there. By the time he reached Havana, he was out of money. After working there to earn more, he got to Guatemala City the following year. When he arrived he was so destitute that he joined the bread line that the Franciscans had established.

Soon, Pedro enrolled in the local Jesuit college in hopes of studying for the priesthood. No matter how hard he tried, however, he could not master the material; he withdrew from school. In 1655 he joined the Secular Franciscan Order. Three years later he opened a hospital for the convalescent poor; a shelter for the homeless and a school for the poor soon followed. Not wanting to neglect the rich of Guatemala City, Pedro began walking through their part of town ringing a bell and inviting them to repent. Other men came to share in Pedro's work. Out of this group came the Bethlehemite Congregation, which won papal approval after Pedro's death. A Bethlehemite sisters' community, similarly founded after Pedro's death, was inspired by his life of prayer and compassion. He is sometimes credited with originating the Christmas Eve *posadas* procession in which people representing Mary and Joseph seek a night's lodging from their neighbors. The custom soon spread to Mexico and other Central American countries. Pedro was canonized in 2002.

April 27: Saint Louis Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716)

Louis's life is inseparable from his efforts to promote genuine devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus and mother of the Church. *Totus tuus* (completely yours) was Louis's personal motto; Karol Wojtyla (Blessed John Paul II, October 22) chose it as his episcopal motto. Born in the Breton village of Montfort, close to Rennes (France), as an adult Louis identified himself by the place of his Baptism instead of his family name, Grignion. After being educated by the Jesuits and the Sulpicians, he was ordained as a diocesan priest in 1700.



Soon he began preaching parish missions throughout western France. His years of ministering to the poor prompted him to travel and live very simply, sometimes getting him into trouble with Church authorities. In his preaching, which attracted thousands of people back to the faith, Father Louis recommended frequent, even daily, Holy Communion (not the custom then!) and imitation of the Virgin Mary's ongoing acceptance of God's will for her life. Louis founded the Missionaries of the Company of Mary (for priests and brothers) and the Daughters of Wisdom, who cared especially for the sick. His book *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* has become a classic explanation of Marian devotion.

Louis died in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, where a basilica has been erected in his honor. He was canonized in 1947.

April 28: Saint Peter Chanel (1803-1841)

Anyone who has worked in loneliness, with great adaptation required and with little apparent success, will find a kindred spirit in Peter Chanel. As a young priest he revived a parish in a "bad" district by the simple method of showing great devotion to the sick. Wanting to be a missionary, he joined the Society of Mary (Marists) at 28. Obediently, he taught in the seminary for five years. Then, as superior of seven Marists, he traveled to Western Oceania where he was entrusted with an apostolic



vicariate (term for a region that may later become a diocese). The bishop accompanying the missionaries left Peter and a brother on Futuna Island in the New Hebrides, promising to return in six months. He was gone five years.

Meanwhile, Pedro struggled with this new language and mastered it, making the difficult adjustment to life with whalers, traders and warring natives. Despite little apparent success and severe want, he maintained a serene and gentle spirit and endless patience and courage. A few natives had been baptized, a few more were being instructed. When the chieftain's son asked to be baptized, persecution by the chieftain reached a climax. Father Chanel was clubbed to death, his body cut to pieces. Within two years after his death, the whole island became Catholic and has remained so. Peter Chanel is the first martyr of Oceania and its patron.

April 29: Saint Catherine of Siena

The value Catherine makes central in her short life and which sounds clearly and consistently through her experience is complete surrender to Christ. What is most impressive about her is that she learns to view her surrender to her Lord as a goal to be reached through time. She was the 23rd child of Jacopo and Lapa Benincasa and grew up as an intelligent, cheerful and intensely religious person.

Catherine disappointed her mother by cutting off her hair as a protest against being overly encouraged to improve her appearance in order to attract a husband. Her father ordered her to be left in peace, and she was given a room of her own for prayer and meditation. She entered the Dominican Third Order at 18 and spent the next three years in seclusion, prayer and austerity. Gradually a group of followers gathered around her—men and women, priests and religious. An active public apostolate grew out of her contemplative life. Her letters, mostly for spiritual instruction and encouragement of her followers, began to take more and more note of public affairs. Opposition and slander resulted from her mixing fearlessly with the world and speaking with the candor and authority of one completely committed to Christ. She was cleared of all charges at the Dominican General Chapter of 1374.



Her public influence reached great heights because of her evident holiness, her membership in the Dominican Third Order, and the deep impression she made on the pope. She worked tirelessly for the crusade against the Turks and for peace between Florence and the pope. In 1378, the Great Schism began, splitting the allegiance of Christendom between two, then three, popes and putting even saints on opposing sides. Catherine spent the last two years of her life in Rome, in prayer and pleading on behalf of the cause of Urban VI and the unity of the Church. She offered herself as a victim for the Church in its agony. She died surrounded by her "children" and was canonized in 1461. Catherine ranks high among the mystics and spiritual writers of the Church. In 1939, she and Francis of Assisi were declared co-patrons of Italy. Paul VI named her and Teresa of Avila doctors of the Church in 1970. Her spiritual testament is found in *The Dialogue*.

April 30: Saint Pius V (1504-1572)

This is the pope whose job was to implement the historic Council of Trent. If we think popes had difficulties in implementing Vatican Council II, Pius V had even greater problems after Trent than



four centuries earlier. During his papacy (1566-1572), Pius V was faced with the almost overwhelming responsibility of getting a shattered and scattered Church back on its feet. The family of God had been shaken by corruption, by the Reformation, by the constant threat of Turkish invasion and by the bloody bickering of the young nation-states. In 1545 a previous pope convened the Council of Trent in an attempt to deal with all these pressing problems. Off and on over 18 years, the Church Fathers discussed, condemned, affirmed and decided upon a course of action. The Council closed in 1563. Pius V was elected in 1566 and was charged with the task of implementing the sweeping reforms called for by the Council. He ordered the founding of seminaries for the proper training of priests. He published a new missal, a new breviary, a new catechism and established the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) classes for the young. Pius zealously enforced legislation against abuses in the Church. He patiently served the sick and the poor by building hospitals, providing food for the hungry and giving money customarily used for the papal banquets to poor Roman converts. His decision to keep wearing his Dominican habit led to the custom of the pope wearing a white cassock.

In striving to reform both Church and state, Pius encountered vehement opposition from England's Queen Elizabeth and the Roman Emperor Maximilian II. Problems in France and in the Netherlands also hindered Pius's hopes for a Europe united against the Turks. Only at the last minute was he able to organize a fleet which won a decisive victory in the Gulf of Lepanto, off Greece, on October 7, 1571. Pius's ceaseless papal quest for a renewal of the Church was grounded in his personal life as a Dominican friar. He spent long hours with his God in prayer, fasted rigorously, deprived himself of many customary papal luxuries and faithfully observed the spirit of the Dominican Rule that he had professed.

For additional reading, comments, and quotes, please visit: <http://www.americancatholic.org>