Mateo on Mission was created by Matthew Smith.
Hi! I’m Matthew, and I’m on a mission to educate you, the reader, about the saints of the Roman Catholic Church through my travels abroad. Ever since I was a kid I knew about the saints. I’ve been raised in a Catholic family, and I have been raised to think of these people as my heroes. I’d hear stories of St. Patrick and St. Francis, and I would wonder how they became such amazing people.

It just so happens that I gained some insight into many of these peoples’ lives from travelling to the cities they lived and worked, their homes, and churches dedicated to their as I studied abroad my sophomore spring semester at St. John's University. The Discover the World program that I was in took place from January 2–May 5 of 2016.

The program had us live six weeks in Rome, Italy, five weeks in Sevilla Spain, and six weeks in Paris, France. I spent my spring break in Ireland and Scotland for a week and travelled to many cities on the weekends. The study component had us take five weeklong classes in each country. We had several hour sessions to enable us to take these classes as three credit courses.

This book comes from one of my classes, which is called an Independent Study Course through the Art Department at St. John's University. I proposed to design a book on the saints to my professor and she approved to work with me. I have travelled in search of these places from country to city to gained insight into these peoples’ lives. I saw the graves and relics of these inspiring people, read their stories, and prayed through their intercession. I write this book with enthusiasm so that you can be touched by the love for God that the saints and I have.

There are just a few things to know before diving into this book. There are a few terms that need to be defined or clarified in order to understand the saints, how Roman Catholics pray to them, and why they are important to us.
**Catholic Terms**

**Canonization**
A saint is someone who we as Catholic Christians believe to have gone to heaven. The saints in the Catholic Church go through what is called the canonization process, in which the church deliberates over the heroic virtue of a person's life. This decision raises the person to the title “venerable.” The second step is a miracle. The church will investigate whether there is a miracle attributed through the particular person's intercession. These miracles are events or healings that occur without scientific evidence to verify its occurrence. The first miracle gives the person the title “blessed.” If a second miracle is legitimate, the person will receive canonization in which they become identified as a saint.

**Intercession**
The saints of the Catholic Church are not prayed to as idols, false gods, or the equivalent to God. When Catholics pray to saints we pray through the intercession of saints. This means that we ask the saints to lift up our prayers to heaven. We see the saints as our friends who can pray for us in any time we ask them to pray for us to the heavenly father. This leads us to veneration.

**Veneration**
Veneration is when we honor the saints. We see the saints as the holiest of holy because they are in union with God in heaven. Since we believe these men and women are in union with God in heaven, we feel the need to honor and prayerfully respect them. We call this veneration. Christians have venerated relics of saints since the time of Roman persecution of the martyrs.

**Reliquary**
A reliquary is a container for relics. There are three types of relics. There is a first class relic, which is a physical piece of a saint's body, a second class relic, which is something that a saint owned, wore, or prayed with in their life, and a third class relic, which is something a saint touched. We venerate these relics in reliquaries, which are usually found in chapels or shrines dedicated to the saint whose relics it houses.

**Incorruptible**
As I said, a physical piece of a saint is a part of their body. There are special instances where saint bodies seem to be completely intact like St. Padre Pio or St. Bernadette. Their bodies look completely intact as if they were sleeping. Incorruptible simply means that the body decays at an extremely slow rate. Because of this the skin does not disintegrate into dust, but takes on a kind of mummification. The church does nothing to preserve their bodies. The only thing they do is put a thin wax layer over the skin because they do not want people to be afraid of the dark brown deoxygenized skin.

**Patron or Patroness**
A patron is someone who is a sort of expert and or someone associated with a certain field of expertise. Saints are patrons of certain things, which mean that they were associated with the thing during their lives. For example, St. Fiacre is the patron saint of gardening. Fiacre himself was a gardener while he was alive.

**Legends**
It is important, when approaching the saints that we understand that very much of the knowledge that we have of the saints of old may have come from legend or oral tradition. This is especially the case with the tales of the martyrs of the Roman Empire. This is not the case with modern-day saints like St. Maximilian Kolbe, whose story is historically documented and told to be true. It is important that when we approach these legends that we understand that even if the person's life did not happen exactly as the story goes, there is still truth, virtue, and love lived out in that person's life.

**Feast Days**
This may be the last thing you need to know before entering into the lives of the saints. The saints are in heaven and we celebrate the day that they died on earth as the feast day because that is the day in which they became in union with our Lord. Death is seen as a passage into new life to us Catholics.
Italy
Jan. 7–Feb. 16

Padua
Jan. 23
St. Luke the Evangelist
St. Anthony of Padua
St. Justina of Padua

Pisa
Jan. 30
St. Raineri Scaccheri

Florence
Jan. 31
St. Philip of Neri
St. Juliana Falconieri

Rome
Feb. 2–16
St. Blaise
St. Valentine
St. Monica of Hippo
St. Paul the Apostle
St. Ignatius of Loyola
St. Cecilia
St. Stephen
St. Lawrence
St. Sebastian
Sts. Cosmas & Damian
St. Pancrazio
St. Agnes
St. Mary Magdalene

The Vatican
Feb. 5–14
St. Peter the Apostle
St. Jude Thaddeus
St. Simon the Zealot
St. Josaphat
St. Padre Pio

Assisi
Feb. 7
St. Francis of Assisi
St. Clare of Assisi

Nettuno
Feb. 16
St. Maria Goretti

Ireland & Scotland
Mar. 27–31

Downpatrick
Mar. 29
St. Patrick
St. Brigid of Ireland
St. Columba of Ireland

Luss
Apr. 2
St. Kessog of Luss

Edinburgh
Apr. 3
Ven. Margaret Sinclair
**France**

Mar. 26–May 5

**Paris**
April 4–26  
St. Genievive  
St. Louis of France  
St. Vincent de Paul  
St. Louise de Marillac  
St. Helena  
St. Madeleine-Sophie Barat  
St. Catherine Labour

**Meaux**
April 22  
St. Fiacre

**Nevers**
April 23  
St. Bernadette Soubirous

**Lisieux**
April 15  
Sts. Louis & Zadie Martin  
St. Terese of Lisieux

**Poland**

April 8–10

**Krakow**
April 8–9  
St. John Paul II  
St. Faustina Kowalska  
St. Jadwiga(Hedwig)

**Auschwitz**
April 10  
St. Maximilian Kolbe
Italy
From:
January 7–February 16

Places Visited:
- Padua
- Venice
- Siena
- Pisa
- Florence
- Rome
- The Vatican
- Assisi
- Nettuno

Taken at the top of the hill in Assisi, Italy.
Padua
Visit on:
January 24.

**Abbey of St. Justina**
- Bones of St. Luke
- Relics of St. Justina

**The Basilica of St. Antonio**
- Relic and body of St. Anthony

Taken at the Basilica of St. Antonio, Padua, Italy.
St. Anthony of Padua
Many of you may know St. Anthony as the person that people pray to when they lose something. This is the story of why people pray to Anthony. He owned a book of psalms that contained notes, comments, and prayers. This was pretty valuable at the time, since the printing press was not even invented yet. One day a novice of his hermitage that he lived in stole this awesome, one of a kind book from him. In hope of finding it, Anthony prayed that the book would be found or returned to him. His prayer was so powerful that the novice returned the book, and decided to stay in the order because of Anthony's faithful prayer. This is why Anthony is the patron saint of lost things and lost people.

Anthony was born with the name Fernando Martins in 1195, Lisbon, Portugal. When he was fifteen years old, he asked to study at the Abbey of Santa Cruz in Coimbra, Portugal. Fernando studied Theology and Latin there. From there, he was ordained a priest. He did not stay there though because several Franciscan Friars who were martyred in Morocco in the early 1200s inspired him to desire martyrdom for Christ. He saw their bodies at Santa Croce Church in Portugal. He asked permission to switch from the order of Augustine to the Franciscan friars. He was granted permission. When he became a friar his name was changed to Anthony after the famous St. Anthony of Egypt.

When he arrived in Morocco, Anthony became ill, so he decided to sail back to Portugal to rest and get better. God had other plans for him though. When he set course for Portugal, the ship blew completely off course and landed him in Sicily, Italy. He was eventually assigned to the hermitage of St. Paulo in Tuscany from there. He recovered from his illness at the hermitage.

Some time later, (historians are unsure how much time passed) the Dominican friars visited the Franciscans in Tuscany. The Dominicans were known for their preaching so the Franciscans assumed that they would give the homily at the mass they were having together. The Dominicans assumed the opposite so no one had a homily prepared for the mass. To fix the problem, the head of the Franciscan hermitage asked Anthony to preach and told him to say whatever the Holy Spirit wanted him to say. Anthony did not want to, but he reluctantly agreed. He spoke beautifully in delivery and the content was striking thanks to the Holy Spirit. The most simple of people could understand Anthony’s preaching because he knew how to communicate God’s word in such an attractive way that Pope Pius XII named him a Doctor of the Church in 1946.

Something to know about Anthony is that he often tried to preach to heretics. They never listened to him though. On one of these occasions, Anthony went out and preached to the fish. He was not trying to convert the fish, but to attractive people to God’s word by preaching to the fish. Needless to say it worked. A crowd flocked to him once the fish did.

Anthony eventually retired to a Convent in Padua, which he founded. He settled in a small house under an acorn tree, which has become a symbol of Anthony. Anthony even at his old age performed a miracle in which he fixed someone’s broken leg in Padua. He continued to preach too, but he became ill. After some time of suffering, he had a vision of Jesus. St. Anthony passed away after this. He died at the age of thirty-six in 1231.
St. Justina

S. GIUSTINA
PROTETRICE DI PADOVA
BASILICA DI S. GIUSTINA, PADOVA
Saint Justina is one of the many Christian martyrs of the Roman Empire. She was a fiery soul for God, and courageously gave her life for Him instead of disrespecting her Lord.

Not much is known of Justina. She was born in Padua, Italy at the time of Emperor Diocletian’s reign in the third century. When she was young, like many early female Christians, she vowed to a life of Chastity. In Padua at that time, many of the people made sacrifices to the Roman gods. There was a day when Justina was ordered to offer her virginity as a sacrifice to the Roman goddess Minerva in the temple dedicated to her.

In sacrificing her virginity in the temple of Minerva, Justina would have desecrated her God. She could not go against her vow of chastity or against her God. Since she refused to sacrifice her virginity or to renounce her savior, the soldiers were ordered to stab her to death. She was martyred in 304 AD.

Feast Day:
June 13

Patron of:
• Padua
• Palmanova
St. Luke the Evangelist
According to Legends, Luke was a supposed painter. There is no evidence of this though. Historians cannot even find a painting to back this theory up. Luke was a physician though. This would correlate with the possibility that he was born a slave because families of that time did educate slaves in order to have a physician on hand in case of an emergency. Paul even addresses Luke as the most dear physician in his letter the Colossians 4:14.

Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles in a third person perspective from the beginning. This changes in Acts 16:8-9. He writes, “Paul passes by Mysia, and that ‘they’ go down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” Then in the next line that Luke writes, 16:10, “we” instead of they, “When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.” So Luke joins Paul right there, and historians have estimated this was c. 51 AD. Luke also stayed with Paul when he was imprisoned and followed him to his death.

Tradition says that Luke lived up to the age of eighty-four, unmarried and died in 74 AD. He died of old age. Scholars have determined his books were written between 70 and 80 AD so it is possible that he wrote them himself if he lived to be that old. Luke is also shown with an ox or calf. Since this symbolizes Jesus’ sacrifice that he made for the whole world, it is fitting that Luke would be seen with this symbol because he heavily emphasizes Jesus’ sacrifice for all.

Luke is known as one of the four evangelists, or gospel writers. Not much is known of Luke’s childhood. Historians only guess that he may have been a slave from Antioch. Because Luke himself was not a Jew, he wrote his gospel for the Gentiles, who are non-Jews. He wrote a gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, which are both found in the New Testament of the Bible.

Luke puts a huge emphasis on the women involved in Jesus’ ministry. Luke wanted to highlight how the poor, lowly, and downtrodden people of this world were the people whom Jesus came to save. Luke’s gospel is the only one that tells the nativity story of Jesus’ birth with the poor shepherds visiting Jesus.

He places Mary of Magdalene, Martha, and the other Mary in much higher importance than the other evangelists do in their gospels. Luke especially shows the importance of the Blessed Mother Mary though. He is the one who tells the story of the birth of Jesus from her perspective. Luke’s Gospel is the only one where the angel Gabriel visits Mary with the most reverent greeting imaginable. Gabriel says “Hail Mary, full of grace.” Only in Luke’s gospel does Mary visit Elizabeth to be greeted by her with “Blessed are you and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” This is where we get the very essence of the Hail Mary prayer. We can thank Luke for the most important prayer that we can say to Mary.

Luke puts emphasis on God’s mercy and his love for those who are poor and suffering as well. Telling from reading his gospel, we can see that he loved and respected women, that God’s kingdom was open to all, and that he saw hope in God’s mercy. God’s mercy is even more relevant to mention now because we currently are in the jubilee, or celebration year of Mercy.
Venice

Visit on:
January 23–25

To St. Geremia Church
▲ Relic of the body of St. Lucia

The shrine of St. Lucia where her body is kept and venerated in St. Geremia Church, Venice, Italy.
St. Lucia of Syracuse
Lucia, or Lucy as I call her, was an early Christian virgin and martyr. So much of her story has been lost, found, and passed on in tradition. She was born into a wealthy family in Syracuse, Sicily in the early 300s. When she was a young girl, Lucy committed her life to Christ similarly to her inspiration, St. Agatha, who was also a virgin of Sicily. As a young girl, Lucy went down into the depths of the catacombs to give food and drink to the Christians being persecuted at the time. She wore a wreath of candles to light her way. The Christians began to call this courageous, young girl the light. Her name literally translated means light too.

As Lucy grew older, her mother arranged a marriage for her. Since her mother was ill, Lucy asked her mother to visit St. Agatha’s tomb with her. Lucy had visited many times because of her devotion to Agatha. Miraculously, Agatha appeared to Lucy in a dream when she visited her tomb, saying that Lucy’s mother would be cured of her illness through her faith. Because of this, Lucy’s mother decided to let her live out her commitment to God as a virgin. Her mother gave her dowry for the wedding to the poor.

Lucy’s suitor became angry with her mother though. He reported her to Paschasius, the Roman governor. Paschasius tried to force Lucy into a brothel to become a prostitute. She warned Paschasius that he would be punished for trying to defile her. He didn’t like that though so he had Lucy’s eyes gouged out.

In another story, Lucy took her eyes out to give to her persistent suitor in the hopes that he would back off. Whichever case is true, we know that she was known for her beautiful eyes, and that they were taken out of their sockets.

After Paschasius took her eyes out he ordered a Roman soldier to grab her and bring her to the brothel, but she became immovable. Lucy became so heavy that not even a team of oxen could hitch her from the ground. Next, the soldiers made a pile of wood around Lucy to light her on fire, but she was impervious to the flames as well. God was miraculously watching over his beautiful daughter.

Because she survived the flames, a soldier slit her throat with his sword. This successfully killed her, unlike the fire. When it was time to bury her, Lucy’s eyes were miraculously found in their sockets. She is known as the patron saint of sight and blindness because of this.

She died as virgin and martyr in 304. By the fifth Century, Lucy was known all over by Christians and was praised for staying true to her Lord. This is from the legends told of her, so we can take this story in faith. We absolutely know that Lucy was a true witness to the faith, and even if she was simply a martyr during Diocletian’s reign, and nothing else, she is still to be honored by Christians throughout the world, especially Syracuse, Italy. The relic of her incorruptible body is currently in St. Geremia Church in Venice and has been since 1861.

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Feast Day: December 13

Patron of:
- Eye sight
- Blindness
Visit on:
January 29

The Basilica of St. Domenico

Relic of the incorrupt head of St. Catherine
St. Catherine of Siena
Maybe you’ve heard of Siena College? Well that college is not named after Catherine, but St. Bernardino of Siena instead, which is so odd because Catherine is way more famous than he is! Siena is a city in Italy and St. Catherine was born there on March 25, 1347.

When she was sixteen years old, her sister Bonaventura died during childbirth. Her parents thought she should replace her sister and marry her husband. Catherine cut her hair short and started fasting to prevent this. Her parents thought they would win, but they saw her devotion was stronger than their will so they let her live her life as she pleased. She entered the third order of St. Dominic, so she could still stay at home, but be associated with a religious society. The sisters in the order taught her how to read. Catherine was able to be a sister similar to how many sisters of today work. At that time once you became a sister, you’d usually be closed off from the world, or cloistered, which is why she joined the third order instead of the first.

Catherine had a habit of giving away things from her family without asking. She quietly ignored the criticisms and continued to give with her generous heart. When Catherine was 21 years old, she had what she called a “mystical marriage with Jesus.” This was a mystical vision that Catherine had of Christ coming to her. He told her to reenter the public life and look after the sick there. He also gave her a ring made out of His skin. Only Catherine could see the ring though. It was invisible to any other person.

She listened to Jesus’ words and started visiting hospitals and homes to care for those who needed care. She even drew followers as she went out. Eventually she became so involved in the world, that she started travelling. Catherine called for reform in the Church wherever she went. Her opinion was very valued and often sought out. She called for people to completely and totally give their hearts to God.

In 1375, in Pisa, on the fourth Sunday of Lent Catherine received the Stigmata in a prayer. Although, similar to the ring on her finger, she prayed that it be invisible, and it did not appear outwardly on her body while she was alive. It was only confirmed on her body after she died.

Catherine was a mediator in persuading Pope Gregory XI, who was in Avignon, France, to move back to Rome. She begged him to reform the clergy, the Papal States, and the universal Church. She wanted peace in Italy. While he left for Rome, he sent Catherine to Florence to win the city over for him, however that did not work. In fact, someone even tried to assassinate her while she was visiting. The attempt was a failure and she said her sins deprived her of martyrdom. She was upset that she could not die for Christ as a martyr that day.

Finally, the Pope made peace in Italy in 1778. Pope Urban VI summoned her to Rome that year for her guidance and help in reforming the church. During this time she desired the punishment of all the sins in the world. She desired to intercede for the world. She wanted to sacrifice herself for the unity of the Reformed church. At this point of her life Catherine was also fasting every day except for Holy Communion. She felt the world’s weight of sin for the last three months of her life. Catherine felt extreme agony in these months. On the Sunday before the Ascension, Catherine passed away. She reconciled Pope Urban VI with the Roman Republic before she died in 1380. She is now known as a Doctor of the Church and is one of the most influential women in the history of the Church.

**Feast Day:**
**April 29**

**Patron of:**
- Fire Prevention
- Illness
- The USA
- Miscarriages
- Sexual Temptation
- Nurses
- Italy
- People Ridiculed for the Faith
Pisa
The relic of the body of St. Raineri in the Pisa Cathedral, Pisa, Italy.

Visit on: January 30

Pisa Cathedral

Relic of the body of St. Raineri
St. Raineri Scaccheri
I never would have heard of this man if I did not walk into the Pisa Cathedral prayer door. He is not a popular saint, but they have his body out to be venerated! I honestly did not think there would be anything special about Pisa after I saw the Leaning Tower, but I was pleasantly surprised with discovering the real reason why I visited Pisa. God called me to visit someone.

Raineri was born in Pisa in 1117 to a very wealthy merchant in Pisa. Despite his wealthy roots, he became a strolling minstrel. He sang and played his fiddle from town to town, all day every day. He loved when people danced to his songs. Their joy at hearing his music filled him with joy. He did not sleep too often because he was always playing the fiddle though. It was the biggest luxury of his simple life.

One day while he was fiddling he met a holy man. The man inspired Raineri to stop fiddling and he asked the man to pray for him. After a conversation with the man Raineri converted to Christianity. Whatever the man said changed his outlook that Raineri on his fiddler lifestyle, which must have been sinful.

He took his fiddle, threw it in a fire, and wept for his sins. Everyone thought he was crazy because his conversion was like a light switch. He changed very quickly and out of nowhere. Raineri became so devout that he became a trader to save up enough money for a pilgrimage trip to the Holy Land. He could not earn his way to the Holy Land though. He threw away the money he was earning for the trip because he thought his money purse stunk of the devil. He had to part with it! He pursued a life of poverty instead and begged his way to Palestine, which did work.

After his pilgrimage, the enlightened Raineri came back to Pisa. He was inspired from his prayerful experience to join St. Andrew’s Monastery in Pisa. From there he spoke with wisdom and good counsel to all who sought it. He also cared for the sick, and joyfully did everything he could to make God happy. He died in 1160.

**Feast Day:** June 17

**Patron of:**
- Travelers
- Pisa
Florence
Visit on: January 31

Church of Santissima Annunziata

▲ Relic of the incorruptable body of St. Juiliana Falconieri

▲ Reliquary of St. Philip Neri

This is the relic of St. Juiliana Falconieri’s incorruptible body, which is in the Church of Santissima Annunziata, Florence, Italy.
St. Philip Neri
Philip was the guy who always made people laugh, so if you know anyone funny that is who Philip was to his friends and everyone he met. He was so funny that, one time, to prove to his students that he needed humiliation, he shaved off half of his beard.

Philip was born in Florence in 1515. At a young age, he was a spontaneous jokester and was unpredictable in everything he did. Once, as a young boy he saw a donkey, and without thinking about it, jumped on it's back just for fun. The beast jumped up and they rolled down into a cellar in the ground. Philip miraculously walked away from this incident without a scratch.

In his late teen years, he was sent to the house of his father's cousin house at St. Germano. His father’s plan was for him to become an heir to his cousin's business there, but Philip kept leaving to pray at a small chapel on the mountain of Monte Cassino nearby. He felt God calling him to Rome because of his time of prayer here. Philip spontaneously left for Rome in 1533 without telling his father. His father’s plan crashed and burned. His most important prayer time in Rome was in the Catacombs of St. Sebastian. One night during his prayer in the catacombs, a golden ball of light appeared in front of him. This ball of light went into his mouth, to become completely absorbed by his heart. Philip was enflamed with the love of the Holy Spirit. As he rose with the joy of the Spirit, he felt a violent jolt in his heart. His heart swelled and it became as big as his fist when he felt his chest. The pain never came again. After his death, doctors examined his heart to discover that his heart actually dilated within his chest. To make room for his enlarged heart, his body cracked two of his ribs to form an arch within his chest.

In 1548, in Rome, he formed a confraternity to take care of pilgrims who were visiting without anywhere to stay. This was a group of laymen, but the Spiritual director told Philip that he could do so much work with if he became a priest. With that, he studied to become and was ordained a priest in 1551.

After he was ordained, Philip lived at the church of San Girolamo. He loved to hear confessions, but he felt that absolution was not enough to stop the young men from sinning. He invited they who he heard confessions from to visit him during the day to discuss spiritual readings and to even stay for evening prayer. Basically, he organized the first bible study session.

Philip continued these meetings of, what he called, the Oratory for the next few years. He even organized visits to the seven pilgrim churches of Rome. He knew that if he gave them more spiritually growing activities to do they would become less likely to sin. This group was like any youth group of today. He spoke to all with love, was patient with everyone, and like any great youth minister, was hilarious at best.

Philip gave the men lessons in humility. He'd always gear the lesson to what the young man needed. To show he was no exception to the rule, Philip would wear ridiculous clothes, walk around with half his beard trimmed, and many other silly stunts to show them that you did not need to be serious to be holy.

Even though he was so funny, when it came to prayer, Philip became super serious. He got so carried away with his devotion that sometimes he refused to preach, said mass alone, and told his followers that the Holy Spirit would teach them how to pray. He changed like a switch when it came to his prayer life.

In 1593, Philip resigned from the office of Superior Director of the Congregation of the Oratory. Within the next two years, he had a severe fever, was healed from it, and suffered from hemorrhages after he was healed. One night Cardinal Baronius, a bishop who lived with him, heard him scream in pain from them. He ran to his cell and gave him his last rights. That night in 1595, Philip died at the age of eighty.
Juliana Falconieri is one of those gems of the church whose story is not well known. I stumbled upon her incorrupt body without a clue of who she was while I visited Florence. She was as pure and innocent as they come, yet fierce like a falcon, which is what her last name translates to from Italian.

Juliana Falconieri was born in 1270 as an answered prayer to her father, who desired a child. He was a builder of the church of the Annunziata in Florence. Her Uncle, Alexis Falconieri adopted her at a young age because unfortunately, her father died. He was one of the founders of the Servite religious order in Florence.

Her uncle said that raising her felt like raising an angel. According to him, she was so modest that she never looked at a mirror her entire life. Alexis also said that the very mention of sin made her shudder and tremble. Once she heard of a scandal so terrible that it made her faint.

This pure, virtuous girl began meditating on the devotion of Our Lady of Sorrows when she was fourteen years old. This drew her to the Servite Order, which was the order of the servants of Mary. She refused marriage the same year, and received the habit of the Sisters of the Servite Order instead. St. Philip Benizi, the general of the order gave her the habit.

Many novices were attracted to the Servite Order because of the sanctity of Juliana. She was asked to draw up a rule of life for them because of how virtuously she led her life. She became the foundress of the Mantellate, which was basically the woman of the Servite Order. Although she founded the new order, she acted more like a servant than the mistress of the Mantellates.

Outside the convent, she led apostolic charity, converted sinners, reconciled enemies, and healed the sick. Some days she was completely involved in ecstasy. When the order became in danger of being suppressed her prayers stopped the suppression. She had the gift of unceasing faith and powerful prayer.

The years went by, and as Juliana grew older, she suffered from a variety of painful diseases. At one point she suffered so much from a disease affecting her stomach, that everything she ate she vomited back up. She endured this pain silently, and stayed cheerful despite it.

Juliana became more and more ill though. She asked a priest to put the corporal that held the Eucharist on top of her breast one day. Since she could not consume Holy Communion, she wanted the next best thing, which was Jesus in the Eucharist, placed over her heart. At the moment of Juliana's death, the Sacred Host disappeared from the corporal.

It turned out that the cross that was on the host was imprinted on her breast directly over her heart when they examined her dead body. She died at the age of seventy in her convent in 1340. Today, her body is incorrupt and is held in the same church that her father helped build.
Rome

Visit on:
February 2–16

St. Giovanni Battitista
Dei Fiorentini Basilica
▲ Relic of the foot of St. Mary Magdalene

Church of St. Augustino
▲ Urn containing the ashes of St. Monica

St. Biagio della Pagnotta Church
▲ Throat bone of St. Blaise

The Catacombs of St. Sebastian
▲ Reliquary of the bones of St. Sebastian

Basilica of St. Paul
▲ Reliquary the bones of St. Paul

Basilica of St. Pancrazio
▲ Relic of the head of St. Pancrazio
St. Maria in Cosmedin Basilica
▲ Relic of the skull of St. Valentine

St. Cecilia Church in Trastevere
▲ Relic of the body of St. Cecilia

St. Lorenzo fuori le Mura Basilica
▲ Reliquary of the remains of St. Lawrence
▲ Reliquary of the remains of St. Stephen

Sts. Cosma e Damiano Basilica
▲ Relic of the bodies of St. Marcus and Marcellian

Church of St. Ignatius of Loyola
▲ Relic of the body of St. Ignatius

Basilica of St. Agnes
▲ Relic of the skull of St. Agnes
The first thing I think of when I hear Mary Magdalene’s name is sinful prostitute. Contrary to this common notion, the Gospels never mention that she was a prostitute. The earliest we hear of Mary Magdalene is in the New Testament of the Bible when she first meets Jesus as a sinful woman. He casts seven demons out of her. Some say the demons represent the seven deadly sins. After they were cast out, she and her lady friends repented to follow Jesus.

The idea of Mary being a prostitute simply is not historically, or scripturally valid. There also has been plenty of confusion between her, Mary of Bethany who anointed Jesus’s feet with perfumes and dried them with her hair, and another woman who also cleaned Jesus’ feet with her hair in repentance for her sins. These were three different women though.

To add to this confusion in 591 St. Pope Gregory I the Great declared that they were all the same woman. Today this is wrong though because in 1969, the General Roman Calendar denounced his declaration, saying that the three women were different. To be abundantly clear, Mary Magdalene did not wash Jesus’ feet with her hair and anoint them with perfumes in repentance for her sins, nor was she a prostitute.

Mary was mentioned over a dozen times in the gospels, especially in Luke’s gospel, and was with Jesus throughout his public ministry. She was most likely mourning at his death on the cross. On the third day Mary visited Jesus’ tomb to anoint his body with perfumes and oils only to find that the stone of his tomb had been rolled away. She encountered an angel within his tomb who told her that Jesus rose from the dead. She was dumbstruck at hearing this.

When she left the tomb, Mary met a nearby gardener and asked him if he knew what had happened. After a few seconds, she came to realize that the gardener was Jesus. He told her to tell Peter and the other apostles that he was alive. This is vital to understanding that Jesus’ mission was to come into the world to encounter the women, the children, and the lowly because Jesus intentionally chose to visit Mary, a woman first, out of all the people to tell, he chose Mary as the first person to tell of his Resurrection.

In 1896, a gospel of Mary and a gospel of Philip were discovered. These gospels are an attempt to show that Jesus and Mary possessed a deep special relationship. This could be true, but if one reads this they should understand that Jesus and Mary never had a marital relationship. For all you Da Vinci Code fans out there, marriage is an earthly thing that Jesus never desired. It was never part of his mission, and we need to remember this when propositions of an alleged marriage come upon us.

Legend tells us that Mary stayed with the early Christians fourteen years after Jesus’ death.

She supposedly was forced onto a boat with other Christians by the Jews and set adrift without any oars or sails. The boat somehow landed in the southern coast of France.

She supposedly spent the next thirty years of her life in France in an Alpine cavern next to the ocean. There is a cave in France that monks live at today that is venerated as the supposed place where Mary was said to have lived.

Eastern tradition tells us that Mary was never forced onto a boat, but instead traveled with St. John the Evangelist to Ephesus where they preached the gospel together. According to the East She eventually died and was buried in what is today Selcuk, Turkey. The Medieval legends say she was John’s wife.

There are many legends of what happened to Mary after the completion of Jesus’ mission. I personally think that the to boat to France is the most plausible because the place is venerated today as such a holy dedicated to her, but we must always remember to take what we can from the saints’ lives with faith to grow closer to God in the process.
St. Monica of Hippo
An uncertain amount of time later, Monica had a dream that convinced her to make up with her son. She was still upset and asked the Bishop to pressure him into returning to the church. The bishop told her to let him alone though, that it was impossible for a son who caused her so much grief to be lost forever. He told her all she could really do was pray for him.

Despite what he said, she travelled to Milan in search of him anyway. She heard that was where he last was. There, she met St. Ambrose, who was a bishop in Milan at the time. He helped her convert Augustine to Christianity. She prayed for his conversion for about thirty years and her prayers were finally answered when she met him in Milan.

After six months, Augustine was baptized legitimately because his father revoked it the first time. He and his mother believed that they were called to spread the Word of God to Africa, but in Civitavecchia, a Roman city, Monica died in 387. Augustine recorded her last words. “Son, nothing in this world now affords me delight. I do not know what there is now left for me to do or why I am still here, all my hopes for this world being now fulfilled.” She is the perfect example of patience and of having faith in prayer amidst tears and sorrow. Augustine could not have had a more devoted and loving mother. All she wanted to do was get him to heaven.

St. Monica is best known as the mother of St. Augustine! She is one of the most inspirational people of prayer we can look to because no matter the trials and sorrows he cause her, her faith was ceaseless in praying for the conversion of her son Augustine for nearly thirty years.

Monica was born in 331 AD, North Africa. As a young woman she was married off to a Roman Pagan named Patricius. He respected her beliefs even though her prayer and Catholic devotion bothered him. They had three children whose names were Augustine, Navigius and Perpetua. Patricius did not let her baptize her children though. He only allowed Augustine to be baptized and that because he became ill. Once Augustine was well, he renounced his agreement to baptize him. Monica baptized him despite his change of mind though.

Throughout their marriage, Monica prayed for the conversion of her husband and mother-in-law. Through her faithful prayer she was able to convert him one year before his death. She was also able to instill the Christian values within her two children Perpetua and Navigius who both entered the religious life.

Augustine was a different story though. He was sent off to Carthage for schooling. She sent him there because she was worried about him and the school did not help him in the way that she thought it would. He became involved with the Manichaean religion. This religion saw the world in light and darkness and instilled the belief that once you died, you would return to the world of light, which is where life comes from. When he came home and told his mother about his new views she kicked him out of the house. He broke his mama’s heart when he told her that.
St. Blaise
If you’ve ever been to Catholic Elementary School and there was a special day where everyone had to go to the auditorium, which was actually the gym of the school, to have a priest cross two white candles over your neck, then this man is why you had that day. If you were ever in this position you can thank St. Blaise for getting you out of class for at least half an hour.

Not much is known about Blaise. We know that he was a bishop who lived during a time when Christianity was persecuted during the fourth century. He was known as the physician of souls. People turned to him for healing miracles. During the time of persecutions, the governor of Cappadocia and of Lesser Armenia, Agricola arrested Bishop Blaise for being a Christian.

As he was being carted to prison, a mother laid her child, who was choking on a fish bone at his feet. Blaise cured the child on the spot. Despite the miracle that he saw, Agricola stayed firm Blaise’s death sentence. Even with Blaise’s miraculous actions, he refused to denounce his God, so Agricola could not change his orders.

His gruesome martyrdom started with iron combs tearing his flesh open. He suffered the terror of having his skin clawed open for a good while before they cut his head off. Because of the similarity of wool combs and iron combs he is known as the patron of wool combs.

Another story says that on his way to the prison, an old woman came to Blaise and told him that her pig had been stolen. Blaise commanded for the wolf to bring the pig back. Immediately, the wolf came to him with the pig completely unharmed. This is why he is known to be the patron saint of wild animals as well.

The same woman brought Blaise two candles to light the cell in which he would stay until his execution. On his feast day we celebrate by having the priest take two candles and cross them over the throat to bless us. This is where those candles come from. If you are fortunate enough to be at his church on his feast day in Rome, the priest will bless you with the relic of his throat bone instead of candles.

**Feast Day:**
February 3

**Patron of:**
- Throat Illness
- Wool Combers
- Wool Trading
- Animals
St. Sebastian
Sebastian is the most well known target of the Roman Army. I mean target literally because once Diocletian heard he was a Christian, Diocletian ordered him to be tied up and put in a field where his archers had target practice.

Sebastian’s youth is unknown. He may have come from southern France to be educated in Milan. All we know is that he joined the Roman Army in 283 AD. He secretly did this to help Christians who were being persecuted under Emperor Diocletian. He was so well blended, that he was promoted to actually serve in the Praetorian Guard for the Emperor.

As he was on guard there were two twin prisoners named Marcus and Marcellian. Since they were imprisoned for being Christians deacons, their parents visited them to try and convince them to renounce Christianity. Since, Sebastian was working the shift that their parents came at, he managed to convert them and a few others within the vicinity of the time. He even converted the local Roman Prefect.

Sebastian was found out though. This was a risky maneuver because he was a soldier who was doing the opposite of what a Roman soldier does. He was reported to Diocletian in 286. In response, Diocletian had the twins Marcus and Marcellian, and everyone that Sebastian converted put to death. He then, had Sebastian tied to a stake in a training field. The archers used him as target practice and left his body on the field when they were finished because they assumed after shooting him with so many arrows that they must have killed him.

St. Irene of Rome came to the rescue in the night. As it turns out he was not completely dead and would have died if she had not picked him up and brought his body to her home. She cleansed his wounds from the arrows and took them out. As soon as he was healthy, Sebastian found Diocletian to surprise him.

Diocletian was taken aback at first. While Sebastian was publically criticizing him for his persecution of the Christians, Diocletian ordered him to be beaten to death by clubs, and thrown into the sewers. Sebastian could not miraculously escape this death sentence though. His death happened as it was ordered.

According to legend, a Christian woman named Lucina found his body in the sewers and brought him to the Catacombs to receive a proper burial. The Catacombs where he was buried are actually known as the Catacombs of St. Sebastian today. Today also, his remains are held and venerated in the church above the Catacombs that they were originally buried in.

Different legends also tell his death differently. Some say Sebastian ran as far as he could when they shot arrows at him on the field and that is why he’s the patron saint of athletes. Others say he did die on the field from being a target. Whether he died on the field, or was in fact healed does not matter. His heroic virtue and faith in God is all that we need from him

Feast Day: January 20

Patron of:
- Soldiers
- Athletes
- Those who Desire a Saintly Death
St. Paul the Apostle
Before Paul was known as Paul, he was Saul, born in Tarsus 10 AD. When he was a child he learned how to make tents. As he grew older, Paul learned leather-working skills that he later used in his ministry. The Roman translation of his name is Paul, and the Jewish name is Saul.

Saul was a Pharisee of the Jews. He persecuted Christians because he did not believe that God chose Jesus to be the Messiah. Saul believed as a Pharisee that the law was just as important as God’s word. Saul travelled throughout synagogues to strongly urge that anyone who believed in Jesus’ mission was to be whipped or ostracized from the community. He even took part in the stoning of St. Stephen, who became the first martyr of the early Christian Church.

After Stephen’s death, Paul travelled to Damascus. On the road to Damascus a bright light shined on his face and knocked him off his horse. He was blinded. Saul heard a voice say, “Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Saul asked, “Who’s speaking? The voice answered, “I am Jesus who you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what to do there.” Saul was given his sight there. He was baptized with the name Paul afterwards. He then prayed and reflected for three years in the country of Arabia before setting out to preach.

He then set out to begin preaching for Jesus and his mission. Paul felt that he was called to spread Jesus’ word to the Gentiles, which was basically his message for the next twenty or so years. He evangelized all across Europe, including Asia Minor and Greece. He established churches within these Gentile communities and wrote letters, or epistles, to them when he left to check in from time to time.

It is believed that seven out of his thirteen letters are authentically from him. The other six may have come from his followers or surviving letters that they scrapped up. These letters are mostly where Christian theological teachings of the Church today stem from. Paul’s letters are read at the holy mass every Sunday and Solemnity and make up quite a bit of the New Testament of the Holy Catholic Bible today.

A way that he taught, because he did not think he was good at speaking, was when he made tents. He had interesting conversations with different people and eventually those conversations led to Christ. This is the process of what we call relational ministry today. Paul met different people where they were at, one on one, to spread Christ’s word in a relational way.

The Jewish Christians did not like how the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised as Jews to become Christians though. Paul had to come to Jerusalem to make a political agreement with Peter to stop the interference of the upset Jewish Apostles. He had to collect money from his Gentile churches in order to help out the one in Jerusalem. Peter and Paul agreed to lead their separate groups of Jews and Gentiles without conflict from here on out.

Conflict arose though. The Jerusalem apostles preached to convert Gentiles in Antioch not too soon after this agreement that they needed to be circumcised. In 50 AD, Paul arrived at the Council of Jerusalem where he and Peter agreed to allow Gentiles to convert to become Christian followers without having to get circumcised. Despite this, right after the meeting Peter did not want to share a meal with Gentile Christians in Antioch. Paul actually called him out though because Peter literally just announced to the early Christian community that the Gentiles were fine without circumcision.

Once, however, Paul brought his Gentile converts to Jerusalem with him. He was arrested for bringing one of them too far into the Temple with him. Since Paul was born a Roman citizen, he was able to have a trial and was sent to Rome. Once in Rome, he was sentenced to death by the sword. He was beheaded in 64 AD during Emperor Nero’s Reign.

Feast Day: October 20

Patron of:
- Missions
- Theologians
- Gentile Christians
St. Pancrazio

**Martirio**

L'imperatore Diocleziano, venuto a conoscenza dell'ardore della fede del giovane neofita, convocò Pancrazio a Palazzo Palatino per interrogarlo personalmente, provvedendo a giudicarlo. Pancrazio rifiutò ripetutamente di abbandonare la fede in Gesù Cristo e l'imperatore ne ordinò la decollazione. Condotto dal Palatino fuori la Porta Aurelia, mentre il sole era al tramonto, la sera del 12 maggio 304 dell'Èra Cristiana, Pancrazio veniva decollato con ciò restituendo la propria vita a Dio. L'illustre matrona romana Ottavilla, che assistette all'esecuzione, lese raccogliere il capo e il corpo del giovane Pancrazio per poi deporli in un sepolcro sito all'interno delle catacombe scavate sotto il terreno di sua proprietà, una zona destinata ai fedeli orientali conosciuta con il nome Cimiterium Calepodii, appena fuori dalla Porta Aurelia.
Not much is known of Pancrazio. He’s a pretty rare saint and he makes me think of my pancreas because of his name. He’s so rare that the only information I could find on him was what was written about him on the sign inside the Basilica that housed his relics.

Pancrazio was not born a Christian. He was actually born of a noble Roman family in 289 AD in Synnada Phrygia, the Roman Asia Minor consular province. Ciriada, his mother died in childbirth and his father Cleonio left him orphaned when he was eight years old. Pancrazio was watched over by his grandfather Dionisio. His grandfather gave both education and goods to his grandson to properly care for him throughout his upbringing.

Somehow Pope Macellino met Dionisio and young Pancrazio c. 303. This was around the same time as Emperor Diocletian’s persecution of the Christians. Despite the inconvenience of the law, the discovery of Christ touched young Pancrazio’s heart. He wanted to follow Christ. Pancrazio asked his grandfather if they could be baptized as Christians. With Dionisio’s permission, Pope Marcellino baptized them both. Christ chose Pancrazio, and the young boy said yes. He eventually said yes to Jesus until the very end. He let his faith waver for nothing.

Emperor Diocletian became aware of the ardor of faith of the young Nephite. He summoned Pancrazio to personally question him of his faith. Pancrazio fervently refused to deny Jesus Christ so the emperor ordered him to death by the sword. Outside the On May 12, 304 at the Porta Aureli at sunset, Pancrazio was beheaded.

This gutsy kid was only fifteen years old. The Roman matron Ottavilla, recovered his body and buried him inside the catacombs known as Cimiterium Calepodil, just outside the Porta Aureliia where he was executed.
St. Valentine

I pronounce you man and wife in the eyes of the Church.
We’ve all heard Valentine’s name before thanks to our world’s famous lovers holiday. The holiday is his feast day though. Although we really don’t know anything about him except from the legends, Valentine is still an inspiration. There are several Valentines throughout the centuries.

Christians became confused as to which man he really was. The Roman Catholic Church actually discontinued Liturgical veneration of Valentine, but they kept his name on the list of official saints of the church. Who really was Valentine? The legends are so inconsistent that we can hardly even identify which Valentine was the real Valentine. The most popular legend was of a faithful man who suffered martyrdom.

Emperor Claudius persecuted Christians at the time of the third century. Valentine was arrested for marrying Christian couples secretly. This was because at that time there was an edict prohibiting the marriage of soldiers. This law was based on the idea that soldiers who were unmarried were better soldiers than the ones who were married because the unmarried soldiers did not have a wife and children to think about as they fought in near-death experiences did not have to worry about what would happen to their wife or children at home if they died.

Valentine even got along with Claudius until he tried to convert him to Christianity. Claudius offered him a deal because Valentine was a nice guy. He told Valentine that he could be beaten with clubs and beheaded afterwards, or he could renounce Christianity. With a strong faith, he refused to renounce Christ. He was then beaten, stoned, and decapitated in c. 270.

His last act of faith was curing his jailer Austerius’ daughter of her blindness. On the day of his execution he left her a note with the salutation “from your Valentine.” This is the first Valentine ever sent. This may be a legend, but it still has the truth of how a man can have so much faith in the sanctity of marriage that he would risk his life to make sure young people could still take part in receiving the graces of the sacrament.

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**Feast Day:**
February 14

**Patron of:**
- Happy Marriages
- Young People
- Love
- Beekeepers
- Epilepsy
St. Cecilia
Cecilia is the patron saint of music. That is the best way for me to recognize her. I never heard of her martyrdom story, but I knew she was the patron of music. Her story is one of the more miraculous ones that I have learned about and I absolutely love it and everything about her.

St. Cecilia was born in the early second century. She was a virgin and martyr for the faith. It is pretty cool that she is a virgin because she was a married woman. She came from an extremely wealthy family, and was given to a young man named Valerian to be married. She wore sackcloth, fasted, and called upon the angels, saints, and virgins of the Lord to protect her virginity when the day of her marriage to him came.

When she got married, it is said that Cecilia heard heavenly music in her heart as she completed the sacrament. This is why she is the patron saint of musicians. When the time came for her to have intercourse with Valerian, she told him that an angel was protecting her virginity. Valerian was not angry like most men of that age would have been. Instead he requested proof that an angel was protecting her. Cecilia told him to travel to the third Milestone to be baptized by Pope Urbanus for the proof.

Valerian listened to her, and once he came back he could see the angel at his newly beloved wife's side. He saw the angel crown Cecilia with a chaplet of roses and a lily. Valerian told his brother about this miracle and his brother decided that he wanted to get baptized too.

He and his brother dedicated their lives to burying the saints who were martyred every day by Prefect Turcius Almachius. Eventually they were arrested and brought before the prefect himself though. They were executed for refusing to give offerings to the Roman gods.

This sorrow only pushed St. Cecilia further in her commitment to bringing others to God. While her husband and brother-in-law buried the dead, Cecilia preached the gospel. She converted over four hundred people. She was eventually found though. Cecilia was arrested and sentenced to death by suffocation in the baths for her Christian beliefs. They shut her in the baths for a night and fires were heaped up and stoked to the most unbearable heat the soldiers could muster. Cecilia did not even break a sweat in the heat of the baths though.

The next day, Almachius heard she survived the baths. To guarantee a death, he had an executioner come to chop off her head in the baths. He struck her neck three times, but her head would not come off. The executioner left her to die. Christians came to collect her blood to venerate her as she preached the gospel to them. She lived for three days as her neck was bleeding. On the third day, she finally died from the loss of blood from the wound.

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**Feast Day:** November 31

**Patron of:** Musical
St. Lawrence
If it ever looks like a rainy day and you’re having a barbeque a great saint to pray to is Lawrence. He’s the patron of barbeques, but his famous roast was a little too burnt for anyone to enjoy it.

Lawrence’s early life is unknown, but we know he was one of the seven deacons of Rome who were instructed to give help to the poor and needy. He was deacon under Pope St. Sixtus II, who was condemned to death under Emperor Valerian. When Lawrence saw Pope St. Sixtus II before his sentenced death, he told Lawrence he would see him three days from then. The pope predicted Lawrence’s death.

Lawrence became so filled with joy of learning of his foretold death that he gave all of his money to the poor and sold expensive items of the church to have more to give to the needy. He did his job well, especially on his last few days.

The Prefect of Rome at the time was greedy and demanded all the treasure of the church from Lawrence. There was a problem here though because Lawrence just gave everything and more of what he owned to the poor. Lawrence was a little witty when he spoke to the Prefect because he knew what the prefect wanted. He also knew what he wanted to give the Prefect.

They were not thinking of the same treasures in the slightest bit. Despite that, he asked him for three days to arrange the treasures of the church for him. Lawrence gathered the blind, lame, ill, leprous, orphaned and widowed, maimed, sick, injured, and any other forms of lowly people he could find within three days. He believed that Pope Sixtus II’s prediction would come true. He knew he’d be in heaven when the time came.

Lawrence gave the Prefect the treasures of the church and he was so angry with him that he condemned Lawrence to death on the spot. This is the day that Lawrence had his great barbeque on. Lawrence was roasted on the gridiron with the burning coals underneath. Legend says that after a long time on the gridiron he said, “This side is done, turn me over!” He was witty to the end. With that he went to heaven as a martyr.

Feast Day:
August 10

Patron of:
- Librarians
- Archivists
- Cooks
- Deacons
- Barbeques
St. Stephen
Stephen is most famous for becoming the first martyr of Christianity. He was the first person who loved Jesus so much that people wanted to kill him for it. He sure started a trend.

Stephen was a Hellenist, which means he was from Greece. He was originally a Jew, although not from Jerusalem. The Hellenists within the Christian community in Jerusalem complained that elderly widows were neglected. To react, the community selected seven deacons to be ordained to take care of the elderly widows. Stephen was one of the seven. He was one of the first deacons of the church.

Stephen was best known out of the seven. Stephen was the most evangelical and he engaged in religious conversations in the synagogues. Because of his bold faith, he was summoned before the Sanhedrin. He was charged with speaking against the law. He clearly was speaking against the Jewish law since he openly proclaimed that Jesus was his savior.

It was a pretty general charge, but Stephen was extremely opposed to temple worship in Jerusalem. He felt the sacrificial cult was idolatrous. He compared it to Aaron’s golden calf saying, “The Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands” (Acts 7:48). Stephen did not keep his thoughts to himself either. He openly said that.

According to the Acts of the Apostles, before Stephen was taken to the outskirts of Jerusalem to be stoned to death, his face shown with the light of an angel. Stephen points out how pertinent Jesus’ death was for us. As he is about to be stoned he says, “Lord Jesus receive my spirit.” He pleaded with God to have mercy on those who stoned him. With that he was the first martyr in all of Christianity. He could not have died a nobler death for Christ.

Feast Day: December 26
Patron of: ▲ Stonemasons
Sts. Cosmas & Damian
Cosmas and Damian were twins! I've never heard of a pair of saints until I learned about these guys. They were born in Arabia in either the third or fourth century. They were immensely skilled in medicine. Cosmas and Damian used their skills and smarts to treat the sick without charging anything for their services.

Because they were Christians they genuinely wanted to help people without receiving anything in return. They were the first physicians to successfully complete a human limb transplant in history and probably the last in history to do such a procedure free of charge.

They lived in Egaea of Cilicia. This meant that once Diocletian's reign came to Cilicia, they had targets on their backs. Governor Lysias sentenced the twins to death. They were tortured and tied up and thrown into the ocean. By the grace of God, they were miraculously freed. They swam as fast as they could toward the shore once they were free.

As they continued to refuse to renounce Christ, they were sentenced to death by decapitation. The only miraculous thing paired with their decapitation is that they refused to denounce Jesus during the entirety of their suffering.

As it turns out, the relics of these saints are not located in this church though. I recently discovered this as I researched for the last bit of this book. Although I prayed through the twins' intercession, it turns out that a different set of twins were translated, or brought, to this church that is dedicated to Cosmas and Damian. You have already read about Sts. Marcus and Marcellian if you read St. Sebastians page. Ironically, this different pair of twins is actually buried in Cosmas and Damian's church.
St. Ignatius of Loyola
Imagine if Jesus personally asked you to serve his church! Ignatius stayed in Rome and listened to his Lord. He formed a permanent union with the church for him and his companions. Their new order within the church made vows to poverty, chastity, obedience to a superior that they would elect, and obedience to the Pope in their plan for a new religious order of priests. Pope Paul III approved the order of the Society of Jesus in 1540, and elected St. Ignatius as the office general of the Jesuit order.

The Society of Jesus spread quickly. Before Ignatius died, there were about 1000 Jesuits divided between Spain, Germany, France, Portugal, Italy, India, and Brazil. He sent Francis Xavier and Peter Canisius to India and Germany. He organized missions to Ethiopia and the Congo Region. Ignatius even founded the Roman College, Embryo of the Gregorian University, a seminary for German seminarians in Rome.

During the last years of his life he created the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. He finished what he started with the order to ensure its success for the future, and clearly it worked because our current Pope, Francis is a Jesuit. He became ill towards the end of his life. He begged his followers for his resignation because of his illness, but they never accepted it. He directed the order to his death. Ever since that day at the Cardoner River in Manresa he prayed The Spiritual Exercises, even to his death in 1556.

Feast Day:
July 31

Patron of:
• Spiritual Retreats

 Ignatius was born to a noble and wealthy family in the castle of the Loyolas, Spain in 1491. As a young man, Ignatius became a knight to serve a relative, who was a duke.

While he served as a knight in defending Pamplona against the French in 1521, Ignatius got hit with a Cannonball. It fractured his right leg and left minor damage to his left leg. They did their best to help him in his injury, but he had to undergo surgery to fix his bone because it was set incorrectly when he initially got hurt. The surgery was incredibly painful, and resulted in many weeks of rest and recovery.

During that time he read a book on the lives of the saints. The writer spoke of service to God as a holy chivalry. Ignatius liked this idea since he used to be a knight, and decided to imitate the lives of these holy people. In 1522, he said goodbye to his family and went on pilgrimage to Northern Spain. In Northern Spain, he confessed his sins and renounced his old desires of glory as a knight by hanging his sword and dagger up next to a statue of the Virgin Mary.

During this time Ignatius experienced life as a beggar. He whipped himself, fasted, and refrained from hygiene in Manresa, which is near Barcelona. One day at the Cardoner River he came up with the idea for The Spiritual Exercises, a book that he wrote later in his life. This book was designed to specifically give his followers spiritual retreats. It is a dynamic system of spirituality based off of the gospels.

He and a few of his followers were ordained in 1537. He served for eighteen months in ministry until his first mass in St. Mary Major Basilica in Rome. In this period of time he had a vision of Christ with the cross on his shoulder next to his Father. The Father said, I wish you to take this man for your servant.” Jesus said to Ignatius, “My will is that you should serve the church.”
St. Agnes
I think I only heard Agnes’ story once before coming to Rome. All I remembered was that she miraculously grew long hair to cover her naked body. I did not understand the reason behind the miracle, but there is more to her story.

Agnes was born into a wealthy Roman Christian family in 291 AD. Since she was beautiful and wealthy, she attracted many suitors. Men always went for the wealthy pretty girls, and they still do. Unfortunately for them, Agnes made a promise to God to never stain her purity. In other words she was not planning on marrying anyone. She hated sin more than death and refused to stain her purity in sin.

When any suitors approached her she said to them, “Jesus Christ is my only spouse.” The suitors were insulted by her devotion to God so they reported her to the authorities as a Christian follower. They acted as children do. Since they did not get what they wanted, they felt that no one could have Agnes, especially the Christian God. She was too much of a taunt for them if she was allowed to live for her God.

Procop, the governor’s son, became so angry with Agnes that he brought her to his father, a Roman government official. He offered her wonderful gifts and all she had to do was deny her God. In an attempt to sway her, he put her in chains. This only brought joy to her face. She was then sent to a place of sin, probably a brothel, but an angel protected her from sin. Finally she was condemned to death. She was beheaded on the spot. Many pagans wept for the death of such a beautiful girl as Agnes.

Another legend says Prefect Sempronius condemned her to be dragged through the street naked because of her devotion to Jesus Christ. Her hair miraculously grew to cover all of her body though, and every man who attempted to rape her was immediately struck blind.

Because of her miraculous protection, they decided to burn Agnes at the stake. Another miracle took place with the fire because it either parted away from her or the wood around her simply would not burn. This third miracle prompted a soldier to cut her head of with his sword. She was a beautiful twelve or thirteen year old girl. They say that the Christians who were present at her death soaked up her blood with their clothes. She died c. 304 AD.

Honestly, I believe that all of this happened to her, but no matter how Agnes died, she was a beautiful daughter of God who courageously lived a life of purity for Him at such a young age. We can all take a lesson from her purity and conviction to Christ. Agnes’ actual skull is in the Basilica dedicated to her in Piazza Navona in Rome to be venerated and honored.
The Vatican
Visit on:
February 5–14

**St. Peter’s Square**
Procession of the relics of the incorruptible bodies of:
- St. Padre Pio
- St. Leopold Mendic

**St. Peter’s Basilica**
- Reliquary of St. Josaphat Kunsevich
- Tomb of St. Peter
- Reliquary of St. Simon the Zealot
- Reliquary of St. Jude Thaddeus

The incorruptable body of St. Leopold Mendic’s inside St. Peter’s Cathedral at the Ash Wednesday celebration of the Holy mass said by Pope Francis.
St. Leopold Mendic
St. Leopold was born with the name Bogdan on May 12, 1866, as the twelfth child in his family. Bogdan was frail as a young boy, but he made up for his frailty with his spiritual strength. When he was sixteen years old, Bogdan left his home and went to a Seraphic School that was funded by Capuchin monks in the area.

Bogdan only grew to be four foot, five inches tall. He developed arthritis later on in his life, which gave him gnarled hands and a stooped frame. To top off his sufferings he had abdominal pains and stuttered when he spoke. His Christian faith truly shows how God chooses the lowly to become His instruments.

In 1885, after many years of studying, Bogdan entered the Capuchin Order. He was a novice at Bassano del Grappa, the church that he entered at. When he entered the order, he was given the name Brother Leopold. He developed into one of the best models of the Franciscan lifestyle. Just a year later he studied in Padua and Venice to become a priest. After five years of studying to become one, he was ordained priest.

During World War I, he was forced into a prison camp in southern Italy because he would not renounce his Croatian heritage. Once the war was over, he wished to go to his home country and be a missionary of Christ. He really desired to spread the gospel in his homeland. His superiors told him he could not though because of his frailties. He was simply not in any physical condition to complete such an arduous mission.

Instead, Father Leopold became the Confessor and Spiritual Director in Padua for the rest of his life. His approach to hearing confessions was often compassionate and empathetic. He was criticized for his compassionate mercy, which is so foolish because he was embodying Christ in his approach to hearing confessions. Compassion and love was Christ’s mission, and Leopold lived that mission every time he forgave people of their sins in the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Father Leopold was extremely sensitive to the suffering in the world. He particularly was outspoken on issues regarding children and abortion. He looked out for the little guys since he was a little guy. He took a liking to expectant mothers and children. His interest actually led him to become an activist in children’s rights and he helped pushed for the building and set up of orphanages for children.

Father Leopold also had a strong relationship with Mother Mary. He called her “his holy boss.” He loved the rosary and prayed it often. Father Leo even celebrated mass at the side altar in the Little Office of the Virgin Mary when he said the mass alone in the friary.

Toward the end of his life, Father Leopold suffered from cancer in his esophagus. On July 30, 1942, he collapsed on the floor in the friary as he was preparing for mass. He was brought to his cell, which was where he heard confessions all of his time in Padua. On that day, the day of his death, he said to the monks “The church and the friary will be hit by the bombs, but not this little cell. Here God exercised so much mercy for people, it must remain as a monument to God’s goodness.” As the friars finished singing the Salve Regina to him on his deathbed he passed on. It turned out that his prediction became true. Bombs from World War II destroyed the church and friary, but left his cell miraculously untouched and intact.

His body is incorruptibly intact. On February 5, while I was in Rome the relics of his and St. Padre Pio’s bodies were brought to the Vatican for to honor the heroic virtue of their lives. I met the right people and was able to attend this procession without even knowing who he was.
St. Padre Pio
In July of 1918, Padre Pio offered himself to Christ in order for the Great War to end. Jesus appeared to him in a vision and pierced his side with a lance on August 5 and 7 that year. He had a physical wound from this vision, which is called transverberation. It showed the union of his love with the Lord. Just a few weeks later Christ appeared to him again and gave him the stigmata for a second time. This time it stayed visible for the rest of his life. 

People flocked to Padre Pio because the word of his stigmata spread. At the beginning, the church denied Padre Pio’s gifts and limited his activities, including guiding people who sought spiritual direction, and hearing confessions. His Daily mass schedule stopped being posted too.

Pope Pius XII eventually approved Padre Pio’s spiritual gifts though. The church just needed to be skeptical at the beginning in order to fully authenticate what was going on. Padre Pio opened a hospital at San Giovanni Rotundo. He was internationally heard of at this point of his life. In the mid 1960s, Padre Pio’s health declined, but he still said daily mass and heard at least fifty confessions a day despite his health. 

On the fiftieth anniversary of his stigmata, Padre Pio said mass, prayed the rosary, and heard confessions as if he was not ill. The next day he was exhausted though, and he struggled to say mass. That night he asked to say his last confession. He renewed his vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty. When Padre Pio died in 1968, his stigmata wounds were healed.
St. Josaphat Kuntsevych
Josaphat Kuntsevych is an interesting man because you probably would never have heard of him unless you had the opportunity to venerate his tomb in the Vatican. He was born as Ioann Kuntsevych in c.1580 in Volodymyr, which is a city in present day Ukraine, but it was part of Poland at the time. He was a young boy when the Synod of Brest Litovsk took place in 1595. He witnessed its effects though, and as a result of the Synod, the Eastern Church decided to return to the Roman Catholic Church. Millions of Christians disagreed with this decision though.

After an apprenticeship with a merchant, Ioann decided to enter the Monastery of the Holy Trinity at Vilna. In 1604, he received his religious habit and was given the name Josaphat. Soon after he became a brother he was ordained a priest. He brought many dissidents back to the Roman Catholic Rite. He became the head of a monastery at Bytene, restored sanctuaries, and converted the most zealous of the people.

He and his friend Joseph Rutsky shared the same zeal for reuniting the Eastern Church with Rome. Together, they planned and planned how they could fix the schism and how to reform monastic life. Josaphat and Rutsky were sent to make changes. Josaphat practiced his early plans of reform and many people disagreed with him. One community even threatened to throw him in the river, but because of his compassion they accepted a few of his reforms instead of drowning him. They gave him the title Ravisher of Souls because of his zealous faith.

In 1617, he was made Archbishop of Polotsk. During this time he restored five major cathedrals and a few smaller cathedrals, helped those living in poverty, and gave away most of his possessions for the benefit of others.

His progress in reform was put to a halt though because when the King of Poland declared him the only legitimate archbishop in the area the people he served broke into riots. All the Byzantine Catholics turned against him, especially when he insisted on the use of the Roman rite instead of the Byzantine rite. He felt this was the best and only real way to reconcile with the Roman Catholic Church despite its objections.

Knowing that he most likely awaited death in the city, Archbishop Kuntsevych travelled in an attempt to fix the damage done by the king despite the aggressive feelings toward him. The separatists wanted Josaphat to make the first strike, but Josaphat made sure he and his compatriots only acted with patience and forbearance. Even though they received many threats, he would not allow himself or his friends to be shaken by the separatists’ aggression.

A priest named Elias tried very hard to set them off though. One day he gave Josaphat so much trouble that he gave his companions permission to lock Elias away if he caused any trouble why he said his morning prayer. They locked him up because he caused trouble. The damage was done even though no harm was done to him.

Josaphat immediately let Elias go, but the crowd used this action as an excuse to attack. They attacked his companions, but Josaphat told them to leave his friends and take him instead. The crowd took this opportunity to furiously beat him with a stick. Then they hacked at him with an axe, and to finish him off, they shot him in the head. They threw Bishop Kuntsevych’s body in the river, along with a dog that tried to protect him. The Jewish people of the community came to rescue Josaphat’s companions from the since they were still being brutally attacked. The Catholics of the city hid and did nothing to help.

Public opinion changed once the people saw what the mob had done. Archbishop Meletius Smotritsky, Josaphat’s rival decided to reconcile with Rome after the violence. Rome canonized Archbishop Josaphat as the first formally canonized saint of the Eastern Church. His body was fished out of the river, and it has been uncorrupt over the centuries. Today, he is venerated in St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican.
St. Peter the Apostle
Everyone knows Peter’s name! He was the disciple of Jesus that we all know became the first Pope and led the early church with Paul. The king in the Chronicles of Narnia books is named after him. He’s an iconic person who captivates people because of how human he was in making so many mistakes in the gospels. What we know of Peter comes mostly from the gospels. According to the gospels, Peter lived in Capernaum with James, John, and his brother Andrew. When he was fishing in the sea of Galilee Jesus called him. Jesus asked him and the others to cast their nets out on the opposite side of their boats. When they did this, the nets were so full to the brim that they ripped and caused the boats to sink. The men decided to follow Jesus after this miracle.

Usually in the gospels, Simon Peter was mentioned first out of all the disciples. Peter was seen as a leader of the group. Peter answered the Pharisees when they questioned the group while Jesus was working signs and miracles. Peter was always the gutsy questioner. He was also known for his lack of faith, despite his gutsiness. In one gospel, Jesus walked on water and called out to Peter to come out to him on the water. Peter stepped out of the boat and onto the water, but feared the waves and doubted that he could walk and started to fall. Jesus caught him as he fell into the water and made Peter aware of his lack of faith.

Another instance when Peter lacks in his faith is during Jesus’ passion when he denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed. Peter hysterically sobbed his eyes out because Jesus foretold that he would deny him on that night. What distinguishes him from Judas though is that Peter sought forgiveness instead of death. Peter is the one that had messed up over and over again, yet still sought Jesus’ forgiveness. He’s a great example for those who seek God’s forgiveness, but lack in faith to see His mercy.

Peter was one of the first disciples to find out that Jesus resurrected from the dead. Mary Magdalene told him and he raced John the Evangelist to the tomb to see for his own eyes. When Jesus asked the apostles who they said he was, Peter answered that He was the Messiah. That is actually where Jesus gives him the name Cephas, although in John’s gospel Jesus gives him the name Peter upon meeting him. This is when Peter became the first pope. Jesus gave him the power to forgive and retain sins, and work miracles in his name.

In the Acts of the Apostles, which is after Jesus ascended into heaven, Peter is the first to speak on Pentecost. Since he was the leader, he chose Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot as the twelfth apostle. Peter allowed Gentiles to enter into Christianity without circumcision after the conversion of Cornelius, a Gentile and some pushing and persistence of Paul. By doing that he truly began the universal church.

During King Herod’s reign he was thrown into a prison, but according to Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, an angel visited him in his cell. The angel freed him from his cell. After this, we don’t really know what happened to Peter for some time. Luke either wrote it and it was lost, or he died before finishing the account. However, we receive a letter from Peter from Babylon, which tells us that he was in Rome at the time.

After some more missionary work including preaching in Antioch, Peter was caught, and an angel did not set him free this time. His mission on earth was over. Peter was martyred for being a Christian. He requested to be crucified upside down because he felt that he did not deserve to die the same way as Jesus did. Historians speculate that he was killed around the time of Emperor Nero’s reign in Rome.

Feast Day: June 29

Patron of:
- Fishermen
- Net Makers
- Ship Builders
St. Simon the Zealot
Simon was one of Jesus’ apostles. He was not part of the Zealot Radicalism of the time, but was known for how zealous and passionate he was for the Jewish law. Simon was one of the original twelve apostles of Jesus. He lived through and witnessed Jesus’ entire public ministry, and went out into the world to proclaim Jesus’ mission after he ascended into heaven.

Little is known of Simon after Pentecost Sunday though. Tradition holds that he continued to spread the Gospel boldly, but it is uncertain exactly where he preached it. According to the Greeks he preached on the Black Sea, in Egypt, Northern Africa, and Britain.

According to legend, he eventually met up with St. Jude Thaddeus in Persia where they both were martyred. According to the Apocryphal Acts of St. Simon and Judas, he was imprisoned and forced to labor in Persia for some time. His brutal death was by the saw. His body was sawed in half by the Persians, which is why is the patron saint of saw men.

**Feast Day:**
October 28

**Patron of:**
- Tanners
- Curriers
- Saw Men
St. Jude Thaddeus
You may have heard of St. Jude’s Children hospital for research in the fight against cancer and other lethal diseases for children. St. Jude is the patron of desperate causes so he’s quite a fitting guy to have this hospital named after.

Jude Thaddeus was, according to legend, born into a Jewish family in Paneas, which was in Galilee. He was actually a cousin of Jesus since his mother was a cousin of Mary and his father was the brother of St. Joseph. Before Jesus called him to become one of the twelve apostles, Jude was married and had at least one child. Jude left his family to follow Jesus. I’m sure they still saw him since Jesus preached mainly to the Jews. Jesus called him and his brother James to be His apostles.

In a story, King Abagar of Edessa asked Jesus to cure him of leprosy and asked an artist to bring him a drawing of Jesus so he could be cured. When Jesus heard of this king with such faith, He decided to press his face into a cloth. He left an imprint of His face on the cloth and gave it to Jude to deliver to the king. Since, King Abagar was so faithful, he was cured.

Though the legend tells that there was an image of Jesus, this may have been an exaggerated version of the story and the king may have been healed upon hearing Jude’s message from Christ. Although, if you think about it, all of these stories could be exaggerated and none of these miracles could have actually happened. We as Catholics have the opportunity to have faith that these stories did happen in the manner that they were told to us.

After Pentecost, Jude traveled throughout Mesopotamia, Libya, and Persia to spread the gospel message. In Mesopotamia, around 35 AD, St. Thomas spread Christianity in this region with him. Jude helped in the mission and they started the churches of what is present-day Iraq. The descendants of the Babylonians and Assyrians were converted and they found a large Christian community there.

Eventually he met up with Simon and they preached together. In c. 60, Jude wrote a letter to his Christian converts in the Eastern churches that he and Thomas established. They were under persecution and he told them to persevere in the harsh moments of danger. He told them to keep the faith in light of all circumstances. His hopeful inspiration is where he as the patron of desperate causes comes from.

It is believed that about five years later, Jude was martyred in either Persia or Syria. Since he is often depicted with an axe or club it is believed that he was killed with either weapon. His remains were brought to Rome and placed in a crypt where St. Peter’s Basilica now stands. He and Simon share a side chapel within St. Peter’s Basilica today and are venerated there.

**Feast Day:**
October 28

**Patron of:**

- Desperate Causes
- Hope
Assisi
Visit on:
February 7

Basilica of St. Chiara
△ Tomb of St. Clare of Assisi

Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi
△ Tomb of St. Francis of Assisi

This is the tomb of St. Francis of Assisi inside the third lowest level of the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi.
St. Clare of Assisi
St. Clare was a truly faithful woman of God. When I learned that Francis mostly inspired her to give her life to Christ in a radical way, I thought it was amazing because I love when I learn that saints worked and lived at the same time as each other. I think it’s the coolest thing!

St. Clare was born in Assisi to a wealthy family. Clare’s father was said to be a wealthy man from an ancient Roman family. Her mother went on pilgrimages including one to the Holy Land. Her mother and sisters Beatrix and Catarina, became sisters in her order later on in her life.

Clare would have followed the family line and married like any other wealthy girl of the time, but she heard Francis preach one day during Lent when she was eighteen years old. Immediately, she renounced all her earthly possessions. On Palm Sunday March 20, 1212, she met Francis at the chapel of Porziuncula. It was there that she cut her hair short, and took a plain robe and a veil to wear. When her father tried to bring her home after Francis positioned her with Benedictine nuns, she yelled to him that she would have no other husband than Jesus.

Many women joined her and her sister Catarina at the Benedictine monastery. Francis gave them a rule of life to live by of poverty, in which they wore no shoes, ate no meat, lived in a simple house, and kept silent most of the time. Her order of sisters was known by the name of the “Order of Poor Ladies of San Damiano,” which is the church they stayed by. They mainly lived to pray and did manual labor. They were happy souls throughout all of this. Ten years after she died the name of the order was changed in honor of her to the Order of Saint Clare.

Eventually Clare became the abbess of the order of sisters, which was the leader. As leader, she had to ward off all the attempts that were made to make her and her sisters lives easier. The popes told her that her life in such extreme poverty was just unnecessary.

She never budged on her stance of the vows she and her sisters lived out. She would answer them every time saying, “They say that we are too poor, but can a heart which possesses the infinite God be truly called poor?” Several different popes opposed this and she did not care.

In 1224 Frederick II’s army planned to attack Assisi. She placed the monstrance on the wall where they could see it, and begged God to save her sisters. As she prayed to God she heard a voice say, “I will keep them always in My care.” As she begged and heard this, the army became so frightened that they ran away, leaving Assisi completely untouched.

They called her Alter Franciscus because she was so dedicated to Francis. That is how she continued to live out in such poverty with her order; he dedication and love for her inspiration, Francis. She cared for him as he became ill and cared for him until his death.

Eventually, Clare became sick though. It was probably due to her extreme vows of poverty, and she suffered from pains similar to Francis’ although she never went blind. In fact one legend says that when she was too ill to get out of bed to attend mass she actually saw and heard the mass happening on the wall. This is why she is the patron saint of television. After suffering with her illness, she passed on in 1253 at the age of fifty-nine years old. Considering her health from the vows she took, it’s amazing that she lived so much longer than Francis did.
St. Francis of Assisi
St. Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of animals, but that's mostly all that is ever known about him. There is so much more that goes into this man's life. That is why I picked him for my confirmation saint and why Pope Francis picked his name as pope after him.

St. Francis was born in Umbria, Assisi 1181 C. He was originally baptized and named after John the Baptist, but his father renamed him Francesco after France because he loved business with the French. His father was a wealthy businessman. Because Francis was so charismatic and wealthy he was allowed to be picky, do poorly in school, break the city curfew, and drink as much as he wanted at wild parties.

Francis’ dad wanted him to take over the family business. Francis was a dreamer though and he joined the medieval army of Assisi when it fought Perugia. Perugia destroyed Assisi in the battle though. They saw his shiny new armor and instantly knew Francis was wealthy. They kept him as prisoner and put him up for ransom. According to legend, Francis first had visions of God when he was taken as a prisoner of war. They kept him for a year until his father finally paid the ransom to the Perugians.

Once he returned to his home he got ready for another battle. He bought the best armor and boasted about coming back from battle as a prince next time he would come home. This did not work though because he had a dream from God that told him to go home. The kid who wanted glory, now twenty-five years old came home to be humiliated. He literally just bragged about soon becoming a prince. He started contemplatively praying. One day he was on the road and saw a leper. Lepers disgusted him, but that day he bent down and kissed the leper. As he left he turned around to wave, and the leper disappeared. He believed that God was actually the leper and was testing him in this event.

After that Francis went to pray at the church of San Damiano. Here Francis saw the famous Byzantine cross of Jesus that He heard speak to him saying, “Francis, repair my church.” Francis literally thought that Jesus wanted him to fix the church of San Damiano so he used his father’s money to repair the church.

His father was furious and threw him in a cell. His father brought him to the bishop in the square. The bishop told Francis to return the money, and Francis said no and stripped down to a hair shirt and walked away. He never made up with his father after this and this was something that he regretted for the rest of his life.

With his hair shirt, he left and sang into the woods, only to be beaten naked by robbers. He continued to walk completely content and at peace though because he felt like he could follow his true Father. He gave up all of his earthly possessions, and walked around in rags, begging for food only when he needed to. He refused to be given money.

Francis took three gospels seriously. These gospels said to give all of your possessions away, preach the gospel everywhere, and to turn the other cheek when someone steals from you. This is the radical Christian life he felt called to live. Francis wanted to create a brotherhood with this mentality, not an order. Francis never wanted to become a priest, but he reluctantly became a deacon after being pressured into it.

For the last several years of life he suffered greatly and prayed to share in the passion of Christ. Christ answered his prayers and gave him the stigmata in a vision. Francis continued to become ill due to wandering in poverty all those years. He even became blind. In Claire’s care, Francis died on October 4, 1226.
Nettuno
Visit on:
February 16

Basilica of St. Maria Goretti
- Reliquary of St. Maria Goretti (her incorrupt body is usually kept here)

St. Maria Goretti’s reliquary, where her incorrupt body would normally be held inside the Basilica of St. Maria Goretti.
St. Maria Goretti
Maria Goretti is one of the most inspirational women I have ever learned about. If you have not heard of her until now get ready because this girl is going to rock your world.

Maria Goretti was born in Corinaldo, Italy on October 16, 1890. She grew up homeschooled by her parents Assunta and Luigi Goretti and was the oldest of five siblings. Her family was not very wealthy. Her father decided to emigrate because a friend of his became very wealthy when he emigrated from Corinaldo.

The Gorettis moved to Colle Gianturco, the master of the land did not want to continue employing Luigi, or Giovanni Serenelli, who was his coworker. Because of this Giovanni and his son Alessandro moved in with the Goretti family. Luigi became extremely sick with malaria, pneumonia and meningitis. Despite his children's prayers the combination of the diseases were too much for him and took him.

After her father’s death she completely trusted in God’s Providence. Maria’s spirituality was quite powerful for such a young girl. She had a special devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist and she did not even receive her first Holy Communion yet. She also had a relationship with Mother Mary. Her mother could not remember a day that Maria did not go to mass. Although she could not read, Marietta memorized her prayers, especially the Holy Rosary. She truly, gave her life to God through her prayer life.

Since Maria had such a faithful fervor and understanding of Jesus in the Eucharist, she was allowed the permission to receive her first Communion when she was ten years old. She pleaded with her mother on and on until she could not refuse. At that time children received their first Communion at the age of twelve. Her described witnessing it as, “Maria made her first communion exactly like a saint.”

Maria would do a lot of the housework and fieldwork at the house. She served her siblings before herself. She dressed them, taught them, and prayed with them every day. Maria would unceasingly pray in the morning and night amidst whatever she was doing.

Alessandro after a month of hostility toward her, proposed to have intercourse with her. She refused because she knew it was a sin. He officially asked her twice before that bleak Saturday. On that day he found a way to get her alone in the kitchen. He asked her to have sex again. Maria said, “No, no, God does not want it. If you do this you will go to hell.” With fury at her refusal he took the kitchen knife and stabbed her eighteen times. He ran to his room, leaving her bleeding on the ground. Her mother found her in the kitchen and she screamed to find her bleeding daughter on the floor. Maria said it was Alessandro, but Luigi could not believe his son could have done this.

She brought Maria to the hospital, but her wounds were too much for her. Eighteen stabs to the arteries is not something you can easily come out of. She lost too much blood already. On her deathbed, Maria was enrolled in the Association of the Daughters of Maria. She was given a medal for this association. Witnesses claimed that the next thing to happened on her deathbed was Maria’s miraculous vision of the Virgin Mary. This was a Saturday so it was only fitting that Mary would visit her child before welcoming her into union with her son.

What really brought her into union with Jesus was her forgiveness though. As she came closer to death, she spoke about Alessandro with forgiveness saying, “Yes for love of Jesus, I forgive him, and I want him to come with me to Paradise.” She was eleven years old. Because of this she is the patron saint of youth, young women, purity, and victims of rape.
Ireland & Scotland
Visited on:
March 27–April 3

Places Visited:
△ Downpatrick, North Ireland
△ Edinburgh, Scotland
△ Luss, Scotland
Visit on:
March 29

Down Cathedral
The gravesight of:
▲ St. Patrick
▲ St. Brigid
▲ St. Columba

Grave where St. Patrick, St. Brigid, and St. Columba’s remains are buried, Downpatrick, North Ireland.
St. Patrick
Patrick was always that awesome saint I learned about when I was a little kid. I learned about the legend of when he cast all the snakes out of Ireland. I feel like my faith in this story has never waivered since I heard it.

Patrick was born in the late fourth century in Britain. It is ironic that as a child he was not very religious because his father was a deacon and his mother was related to St. Martin of Tours. He was hardly educated and Irish pirates kidnapped him from his family to enslave him when he was sixteen years old. Patrick was ordered to tend to the sheep as a slave for them.

For six years he labored as a slave in Ireland. When Patrick was enslaved he grew closer to God. The Druid pagans owned him as a slave, and their paganism drove him to desire more and more to convert them to Christianity.

Patrick had a dream during his captivity that God would provide him a boat to bring him back to Britain. He found a ship shortly after the dream, and convinced the sailors to let him join them. Eventually he made it home, and went to Auxere, France to study to become a priest. He was ordained a priest after studying and was ultimately ordained a bishop by St. Germanus.

In Patrick’s autobiography, Confessio, he wrote about a dream that he had where the Irish wrote him a letter. Within this letter, the Irish pleaded to Patrick to come back to Ireland. Patrick saw this dream as a call from God to go on mission to convert Ireland to Christianity. He arrived at Slane, Ireland on March 25, 433. From there we only know legends of his ministry.

As soon as Patrick landed in Ireland, there was a chance that the Druid pagans would murder him, but he was able to preach the gospel for the rest of his life there without becoming a martyr. He met opposition, but the people eventually conceded to him because he unceasingly preached, and baptized. He caught the attention from the crowds and they loved him.

There are legends that Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland (although if you can find a snake in Ireland I’d love you to show me). Snakes may never have been in Ireland in the first place anyway. This was most likely an adaptation of how he drove the snakes of evil and sin out of the once heavily pagan country of Ireland and converted a majority of it to Christianity.

The nature rituals of the Druid paganism were adopted into Christian rituals. Patrick founded and spread the dioceses and churches throughout Ireland. He created the Celtic cross, which was inspired by a sun-god ideology combined with his Christian ideology.

Patrick is known for his teaching on the analogy of the Holy Trinity and the shamrock. He showed that there are three persons in one God similarly to how there are three leaves to one shamrock. He used this to explain one of the deepest mysteries of the Christian faith in a simple way to the common people. He’s also known for his autobiography Confessio, in which he talks seriously about how God moved him in his life.

Patrick’s legacy has changed Ireland and for that he is the patron saint, and the most known saint of Ireland. He even has a town named Downpatrick after him. The people love him to this day and celebrate his life on his feast day every year. Patrick is believed to have suffered toward the end of his life since he lived most of it in poverty. He died c. 461.
St. Brigid of Ireland
I literally did not even hear of Brigid of Ireland until this girl named Lindy mentioned how awesome she was while we were travelling to France with St. John’s. She did not tell me her life story, but from what I could grasp I knew I needed to try to see if I could visit this woman.

Brigid of Ireland was born c. 451 in Kildare, Ireland and was named after a Celtic goddess. What we know of her comes from folklore and legends. She was born to Brocca, a Christian slave who was baptized by St. Patrick, and Dubtach, a wealthy nobleman.

Since her mother was a slave, Brigid was born into slavery as well. She was sold to a Druid and any milk that the Druid fed to her she vomited back up. The only thing that could feed her without her spitting up the milk was a cow with red ears, which somehow sustained her.

As a child she constantly cured and fed those in poverty. Once, she gave away her mother’s stock of butter, but prayed for it to be replenished and it was. Once she grew to be ten years old she was given back to her father. She continuously donated his possessions to the poor throughout the time that she lived with him.

Her generosity bothered her father so much that he brought her to King Leinster to try and sell her. As he was doing this, she actually gave his bejeweled sword to a beggar so that he could trade it in order to get food for his family. The king was a Christian and saw the fire of the Holy Spirit within her. He convinced her father to set her free from slavery instead of selling her.

Once free, Brigid went back to her mother, and worked for the Druid by selling her dairy products. Brigid often gave away free dairy, but was successfully selling the milk while doing this. Her generous heart amazed the Druid, who decided to set her mother free because he admired the purity of Brigid’s heart.

Brigid returned to her father after helping her mother. Even though he freed her, his father wanted to marry her off to a bard anyway. She refused to marry and vowed to a life of chastity. She prayed to God to take her beauty away so that no one else would seek to marry her. This certainly shows how superficial society was because her pure spirit was not desired once God took her outside beauty away.

God answered her prayer accordingly. Once she took her final vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, her beauty returned to her and she was officially a sister. St. Patrick was the one who heard her vows and he accidentally gave her the form in which you ordain a priest with. After she became a nun, she founded a monastery in Kildare called the Church of the Oak over what used to be the shrine to the Celtic goddess Brigid.

She and a few of her companions founded the Communal Consecrated Religious Life of Ireland and opened two monasteries there, one for women and one for men. She invited a hermit named Conleth to be the spiritual director for the monasteries. Eventually she sent who Conleth who would eventually become a saint too to become the bishop of the people.

Brigid also funded a school of art, which included metalwork and illumination. She put Bishop Conleth in charge of the school as well. She and Patrick were also good friends. Brigid is such a light for the Irish people since she and Patrick, their patron saints worked so selflessly for them together. She died of natural causes on February 1, 522. All of this information is according to legend, so please take her story with faith and remember that there is always truth that can be taken away even if she did not actually rely on a cow with red ears to raise sustain her.
St. Colomba of Ireland
As it turns out, I learned where the name the Knights of Columbus comes from. St. Columba is the man that that group of men at my church got their name from. The group is not even affiliated with him to my knowledge.

Columba was born c. 521 in what is today Donegal, Ireland into a royal family. Columba first studied theology under Saint Finnian of Moville, and was relocated to study under Saint Finnian of Clonard. After earnest studying, Columba became ordained as a priest when he was younger than the age of twenty-five years old.

In the early years of his priesthood he found monasteries in Daire-Calgaich, Derry, and Durrow. He and his disciples founded a monastery on the Island of Iona c. 563. This became the motherhouse for the abbots and bishops of the area. It helped geographically for evangelization.

Columba even inaugurated King Aidan MacGabrain of Dalraida at this monastery. Then, he accompanied the king back to Ireland to help determine where the King of Dalraida ranked in comparison to the King of Ireland in importance.

He went back to Iona after this, which is where he spent most of the rest of his life. Columba and his colleagues helped to evangelize the rest of Scotland. Columba also established a monastic rule of life there, which lasted until Saint Benedict introduced a new rule of life for monks.

Columba is also confused with Kessog most of the time in who spread Christianity to the Picts of Scotland. Kessog beat him to the punch with the Picts, and most of Scotland for that matter, but Columba did evangelize to whomever Kessog missed. Columba eventually died in Iona. The year he died in is undetermined.
Visit on:
April 2

Luss Parish Church
St. Kessog found and built this church (whereabouts of his remains are unknown)
St. Kessog of Luss
St. Kessog is a rare gem that I was lucky to discover during my stay in Scotland. I never even heard the name until I saw this church that he built near Loch Lomand in Luss, Scotland.

Kessog was born in about 460 AD. He lived in the royal family of Munster, Ireland. As a child he seemed to be pious and holy. His childlike piety comes from a story when he, as a small child was playing with several princes from the area. There was an accident where all the children drowned in a river except Kessog.

The kings were furious when they found out that their children were dead, but Kessog prayed the next night for the princes' revival. His prayers were answered and because they were he was sent to a monastery at Nendrum, Down County. St. Machaloi educated him there. Eventually he was ordained a priest and sent on mission to Luss to evangelize in Scotland.

He was quite strategic in building his monastery in Inchtavannach, which was where the traffic of Loch Lomand was. His travels from there are documented by ancient Gaelic names of the area, like Kessock Hill, which is outside Inverness, where he converted the Northern Picts.

He spread the gospel message to the Picts forty years before St. Columba went there to evangelize. Columba may have gotten credit for converting them, but we know that Kessog was the first missionary to spread Christianity throughout present-day Scotland.

Legend says he was martyred at Bandry by brigands and mercenaries on the Druid's new year near an ancient Druid sight in c. 520. Druids may have arranged his death since it was around the time of the Druid New Year celebration, but this is uncertain speculation. He was revered in Pre-Reformation Scotland. Kessog's remains seem to have been lost in history, but this church that he built is a wonderful testament to the heroic virtue of his life for Christ as a missionary.

Feast Day: March 10
Patron of: Scotland
Edinburgh
Visit on:
April 3

St. Patrick’s Church
▲ Tomb of Ven. Margaret Sinclair
Ven. Margaret Sinclair
Venerable Margaret Sinclair is a rare person to learn about because she is still on her path to sainthood, but she is a remarkable and inspirational woman that we can all learn a thing or two from when it comes to having faith in God's providence in our own lives.

Margaret Sinclair was born in a blackened tenement building of Middle Arthur Place and Blackfriars Street in 1900, Edinburgh, Scotland. When she prayed at mass, she was poorly dressed and had to hold her baby sister in her arms. Religious tolerance in Edinburgh was not really popular during the early twentieth century. Her father, Andrew, was a convert to Catholicism. He, and her mother Elizabeth had six children in a three roomed flat. Margaret was close with her sister Bella growing up. When she was young, she could not go to school because she had to care for her ill mother. In her spare time she scrubbed floors and ran errands for a tailoress. Once her mother was well again she was able to attend school once more.

She had to leave school again not too soon after in 1914 when her father and brother had to go off to fight in the Great War. Her childhood was basically over when this happened. She and Bella had to support their mother with minimal wages from tough jobs. Her mother wept and broke down every now and then. She spent her lonely hours of anxiety in prayer because she saw prayer as the answer to life's suffering.

Every day at the factory she worked in, her boss threw her Blessed Virgin Mary card into the trash. She fished it out and put it up in her workspace every time he did that. It was a constant cycle and her devotion was not respected, but she never backed down in her love for Mary.

When the war ended, her father came home, but the Scottish economy had a bit of a depression. She found a new job at McVitie Biscuits once he returned, so she no longer needed the factory job to support her family. Her family was even able to take a holiday to Rosewall, which was in the countryside. She and Bella took advantage and went to mass every day there.

According to some photographs taken of Margaret, she was gorgeous. She liked to dance and wear pretty clothes. She had a boyfriend named Patrick Lynch. She brought him back to God and the sacraments. He saw a purpose in life again because of her so he asked her to marry him. Margaret did not love him like that though. She was so distraught she went to confession about it. She was willing and thought she had to sacrifice her desire to become a nun for marriage, but God just wanted to see if she was willing to do his will. Relieved with peace, she wrote Pat a letter saying no and how she knew he would trust God to find his happiness.

She felt called to become a sister particularly within the Poor Clares. She and Father Agius were doubtful of her endurance for such a life. She really had to practice self-discipline to make that kind of life work for her. She applied to the Poor Clares at home and they said no. She applied to Notting Hill, London and they said no because of her lack in education. Most of the Poor Clares were aristocratic and did not understand why she would want a life of hard service. She presented herself before them and simply desired to be a Poor Clare. She became a sister soon after. As she lived with them, they decided to vote for her to receive her habit. On February 4, 1924, Margaret received her name, which was Sister Mary Francis of the five wounds.

In February of 1925, she gave her first profession as an official Poor Clare sister, which means that she professed her life to Jesus. Sadly, in March she was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Throughout that year she suffered from it. She said on her deathbed, “If I can gain one soul for Jesus it will be worth it all.” She died November 25, 1925 with a smile on her face.

Feast Day:  
July 20

Patron of:  
▲ Expectant Mothers  
▲ Against Kidney Disease  
▲ Against Loss of Milk by Nursing Mothers
France
Visit on
April 24–May 5

Places Visited:
▲ Paris
▲ Lisieux
▲ Meaux
▲ Nevers

Statue of St. Bernadette Soubirous at St. Gildard’s Convent, Nevers, France.
Paris

Visit on:
April 24–May 6

St. Francis Xavier for Foreign Missions
▲ Relic of the incorruptible body of St. Madeleine-Sophie Barat

St. Etienne du Mont Church
▲ Remains of St. Genevieve

Versailles Cathedral
▲ Reliquary of St. Louis

Saint-Leu-Saint-Gilles Church
▲ Reliquary of St. Helena
The incorruptable body of St. Louise de Marillac, Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Paris, France.

St. Vincent de Paul Chapel
- Relics of St. Vincent de Paul

Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal
- Relic of the incorruptible body of St. Louis de Marillac
- Relic of the incorruptible body of St. Catherine Laboure
St. Madeleine-Sophie Barat
When I researched St. Madeleine I learned that the giraffe toy named Sophie was first sold in France in the nineteenth century, and that toy was actually named after this woman. The saints are everywhere if we look hard enough.

Madeleine-Sophie Barat was born in Joigny, France in 1779. She was invited to Paris after the Reign of Terror, during the French Revolution. At first she wanted to become a Carmelite nun. Her experience with the violence of the revolution changed her mind though. She wanted to impact the world of violence that she saw with the love of Christ, and not to be cloistered, or closed off from the world in a convent.

In 1800, she founded the Society of the Sacred Heart, whose goal was to make the love of God through the Sacred Heart of Jesus known throughout the world. She wanted to restore the Christian life in France by educating young women of all classes of social order.

She was able to spread the Society of the Sacred Heart and expand it throughout Europe. She more and more developed into the woman that God called her to be. She became a leader and friend to all the women who joined the society. She learned that the counter-balance to the new sect of Christianity, Jansenism, was her new society. Her experience of the love of God revealed to her through Jesus’ Sacred Heart was at war with the new surfaced ideas of the world.

She was a wonderful friend to everyone. Her personality was that of a social butterfly. Family, members of the society, clergy, students, and anyone that had a pulse could become her friend. She had love for everyone that even a blade of grass could get her excited.

Madeleine understood how the world around her worked too. She was extremely keen to understanding the social, political, economic and religious happenings in the world. This was especially key to the success of the Society of the Sacred Heart because her awareness allowed her to gauge and shape the education and the promotion of women within the group and the world that the group was in.

Madeleine was able to from a style of leadership unlike any other before her because she was the founder and superior general. She leaned toward moderation, the middle ground, and the more realistic option than the ideal impossible option. She led by consulting others instead of ordering. Her leadership methods were questioned, but she remained in charge until she passed away in 1865.

Spiritually, Madeleine led the society grounded in Jesus’ Sacred Heart. She committed her life to deep spiritual reflection and prayer. She always invited members to enter in and let Jesus be the center of their lives in whatever work they did. This was written in the Constitution of the Society of the Sacred Heart in 1815.

In 1826, she even received formal approval from Pope Leo XII for her order. Toward the end of her life, Madeleine was leading an international community of 3,359 women inspired to hold Jesus’s Heart within their hearts as they offered education to women in Europe, North Africa, and North and South America. As leader she had a keen sense in picking the right people for leadership positions and would always trust them in their positions.

Madeline became ill in 1865, and actually predicted that she would die from it four days later. She knew this because on the fourth day was the celebration of the Ascension of Jesus. She always had a keen sight of how things were and she had this sight as her death approached. Her body has been incorrupt since she died and is venerated and honored in Paris, France today.

Feast Day: May 25

Patron of:
- Young Girls
- Education
- Ministry
- Sacred Heart of Jesus
St. Genievive
Genevieve is the patron saint of Paris and if you visit Paris and are an observant person it would be surprising if you left without at least reading her name once. There are statues of her all over Paris, from the outside of the Notre Dame Cathedral to random parks in the city.

Genevieve was born around 422 AD in Nanterre, which was a town near Paris. When she was seven years old, a man named Pelagius spread heresy in her village. St. Germain of Auxerre came to her village to combat this heresy. He noticed her, a little girl, and he personally encouraged her to join the religious life. She, without hesitation, wanted him to take her to a church where she planned to consecrate herself to God as a virgin right there in that moment.

When one of her parents died she moved to the city of Paris. According to legend, she predicted the invasion of the Huns into France and that they would come to Paris. When the community heard that the Huns were in France the inhabitants of the city planned to leave.

She persuaded the community to fast and pray for the aversion of the invasion though. She assured the people that God would protect them. The faithful prayers of the paid off when the Huns came. Attila the Hun changed the course of attack to Orleans, which was in the south of France, instead of Paris. They even lost their battle there. She believed that this was because of the faithful prayer of the people of Paris.

She also influenced King Childeric I of the Salian Franks to build a church over Saint Denis’ tomb because he is the patron saint of France. After a life of zeal, generosity, constant prayer, and good works, Genevieve died in 512. When she was buried she was dressed in a long flowing gown and a mantle, similarly to how the Blessed Mother Mary dressed.

Feast Day: January 3
Patron of: Paris
St. Louis of France
A fun fact is that Louis is the only king of France to be declared as a Saint by the Catholic Church. The other kings may have been Catholic, but this man was different than the others. Louis was born to the royal family of France on April 25, 1214. He was the fourth child of King Louis VIII and Queen Blanche of Castile. His three older siblings died at young ages so when his father died while he was twelve years old, he became the next heir to the throne.

Before he became the king of France, Louis enjoyed horseback riding, hunting, biblical history, ancient literature, and geography. Sometimes he had a temper as a boy too. His father died on returning from an expedition on November 8, 1226. Soon after his father’s death, his mother brought him to Maux for his coronation as king.

His mother took over the throne from 1226 until 1234, which is when her son, the now King Louis IX was old enough to start ruling on his own. King Louis IX was a kind, engaging king. He gave the people what was due to them and did not treat any people greater or lesser than how they should have been treated. Most of the time if he could, he delivered justice personally.

He was known as the pious king, who was not only a friend to the church, but also to the clergy. He respected the pope as well, but some papal demands were deemed unreasonable to him at times and he felt the need to protect his clergy from the pope’s unjust demands.

As his kingship continued, Blanche picked Margaret, daughter of Raymond Berenger IV to be Louis’ wife. They got married May 29, 1234. Louis was super excited to become a husband and they had eleven children together.

After his wedding he and his army defeated the English at the Bridge of Taillebourg in 1242. Soon after they retreated back to London, Louis came down with malaria. Because of this he felt called to take up the burden of freeing the Holy Land of Muslim and Egyptian control.

At this point in history the Muslims had taken control of Jerusalem, and the sultan of Egypt controlled Damascus. If the West did not get involved the Eastern Christian Kingdom would not have survived. He and his army intervened and the crusade looked good at first. Unfortunately for Louis, he and his army had to retreat and were captured by the Egyptians. He and his barons were freed in exchange for a high ransom though, so if anything it was just humiliating for King Louis to have to go through that.

Within four years of this battle, King Louis changed this military defeat into a diplomatic success where he was able to gain alliances. He was able to fortify the Christian cities of Syria while he was there. When he came back from the crusade he learned that his mother died and that some officials abused the power of the kingdom in his absence as well. Louis appointed investigators to right the wrongs that these officials had committed and reformed his administration of ruling France as well.

He gave more accountable laws to officials in 1254 and 1256 forbidding royal officials from gambling and purchasing land, and marrying of daughters had to be consulted with him before any political move was made. He also forbade prostitution, judicial duel, and settling conflicts with battle. Under his reformed administration counterfeit money had more punishments by law tied to it as well. He adopted a new stable currency for the kingdom too.

Like any saint, Louis was still human. He struggled with his quick temper, violence, and gluttony. He didn’t always protect the priests from abuse too. In 1269, he went on another crusade to stop the Muslim advance in Tunisia. Louis was killed in battle in this crusade. Luckily, beforehand, he entrusted France to his son Philip. He honorably died in c. 1270.
Helena was born around 270 AD. She married Constantius, but he decided to divorce her and married the stepdaughter of Emperor Maximian instead of her. She had Constantine with him before the divorce. Her son Constantine won the battle at the Milvian Bridge, which he believed to be a win because of the Christian God. According to legend, he saw the symbol of the Chi-Rho or the cross in the sky the night before the battle and heard a voice tell him to bear that symbol in battle. He had his soldiers put that symbol on their armor and shields as they prepared and headed to battle.

He and his army won the battle. This victory inspired Helena to convert to Christianity. She was also made Helena, Empress of Rome by her son. Helena had an eldest grandson named Crispus. Her son, Constantine’s second wife, Fausta accused Crispus of seducing her. As a result he was executed. Helena was so upset with the loss of her grandson that she denounced Fausta and had her executed out of grief.

This grief caused Helena to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land as well. There, she had Churches built in Bethlehem and on the mountain where Jesus supposedly ascended into heaven. She paid homage to the Holy Steps that Jesus walked up to Pontius Pilate on when he was condemned to death. She claimed to have even found the true cross that Jesus was crucified and died on while she was there.

With the power of an empress, she was able to bring the Holy Steps back to Rome with her. She also brought what she claimed to be the tablet with the inscription of Pontius Pilate’s condemnation of Jesus to death on it, a nail from his crucifixion, and several thorns from his crown of thorns. She also brought dirt of Jerusalem back to Rome where she had the Basilica of San Croce en Gerusalem built. That church became the home of the holy relics she found.

Helena died c. 328 in Nicomedia, which is present-day Turkey. Her relics were in Rome, but a monk who visited Rome stole some of her relics and brought them to Haggersville, France. Eventually the relics were moved to L’glesia Saint-Louis-Saint-Gille, which is a church in Paris.

This is a much more skeptical story than most. Her relics travelled a great deal to be in Paris for me to visit. She could have actually brought the true cross of Jesus back, or she could have just believed it was the true cross. It is always up to the believer in how much they want to believe.

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**Feast Day:**

**October 28**

**Patron of:**

- Archaeologists
- Empresses
- Difficult Marriages
St. Louise de Marillac
If you have ever been to St. John’s University, there is a building that students have classes in called Marillac Hall. This building is named after Louise and she is a huge contributor to what they call at St. John’s the Vincentian family.

Louise was born near Meaux, France on August 5, 1591. When She was very young, she lost her mother. When she was fifteen years old, she lost her father as well. From there she desired to become a nun, but her confessor told her not to become one. Louise married a man named Antony LeGras instead. They had one son and were happily married in Paris. During her marriage she felt the need to care for the poor. She became a leader of a group of wealthy women who cared for and aided those suffering from poverty and disease in the community. This group of women became the Ladies of Charity.

The people of Paris imprisoned Louis’ two uncles who worked in the government during the civil unrest of Paris. One was executed publicly and the other died in prison. In 1623, Antoine suffered immensely from illness and suffered for two years before he died. The combination of these events drove Louise up a wall. She loved these men and she suffered immensely to see them all to helplessly die before her eyes.

Depression was slowly making its way into her life, but there was hope. While at a prayer one day she saw a vision of herself serving the poor and leading the evangelical counsels in her community. She wrote down this experience, which she called a “lumiere,” and carried it with her to remind her that God was with her. A priest appeared to her in that vision as well. This priest was going to become a very good friend and mentor to her in the future.

A good friend of hers named St. Francis de Sales, who was able to counsel her and help her in her time of depression told her that he did not have enough free time to fully help. When she asked the Bishop of Belley, he said he did not have time either. She knew someone was out there to spiritually guide her.

Louis met Fr. Vincent de Paul and sought his spiritual direction, but he said that he was too busy with the Confraternities of Charity. Eventually he realized she was what he needed to lead his group of aristocratic women though. He asked her in 1629 to lead missions and different tasks to serve the community. This was a type of therapy that Louise needed with the traumas of her past still effecting her heart.

She led the Sisters of Charity (though Vincent preferred the name Daughters of Charity). She opened her home up to train young women to address the needs of poor persons and to teach them community life. She learned how to organize and systematize the Daughters of Charity in the most effective way that she could.

Instead of your typical nuns who have a convent, cell, chapel, and cloister, Vincent wanted them to live in the house of the sick, live in a hired room, go to the parish church, and go out to the streets and hospitals of Paris to care and love the needy. They did not have a habit, but dressed like peasants. It took quite a while for Vincent to allow four of them to take vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. It took even longer for Rome to approve this new religious order because it was not your typical order. If it were, then they would have been closed off from society. They needed to be a part of society so that they could understand and help it.

By the time Louise finished systematizing the organization, there were over forty houses in France. This amazing widow who finally became a nun died on March 15, 1660. She wanted to be a nun from the beginning, but God wanted her path to be more extraordinary than the life of any ordinary nun in a convent.
St. Vincent de Paul
If you’ve ever been to St. John’s University, you would not just know about Louis de Marillac. You’d know that the school is a Vincentian school and that it models its service after St. Vincent de Paul as well. He has inspired so many students who have passed through it in their service to others in their lives and their faith experience.

Vincent de Paul was born in Pouy, Gascony, France c. 1580. He was born into a peasant family and had three brothers and two sisters. When he was young, he worked in the fields. He did all sorts of farm work barefoot with meager meals. His father sent him to the Franciscan school De Dax, and paid for it by selling the oxen. Vincent wanted to go to school in Dax because it was wealthy and he was ashamed of his lowly life.

When he grew older, he taught humanities at the Buzet School to pay for his studies of theology. That same year he was ordained a deacon and the Bishop of Perigueux ordained him a priest two years later in Chateau-l’Eveque.

The Bishop of Dax offered him a parish, but Fr. Vincent declined this in hopes to study more to rise to a higher position in the church. He wanted to become a bishop. In 1604 he earned a Doctorate in Theology and left for Burdeos.

After twelve years as a priest, he felt his first real ministry at his old parish of Clichy La Garanne. It only had six hundred parishioners. He taught Catechetics and repaired furniture there. A year later, Bishop Berulle positioned him as a teacher for the Gondi family, which was a comfortable position for someone like him who wanted wealth within his life as a priest.

While with the family, he encountered the poor. In 1617, Vincent visited a person in agony in Gannes, near his family’s home. He told sins to Fr. Vincent that he never revealed to a priest before. After the encounter, Vincent preached about the importance of confession and what it could do for people. This event helped Vincent begin to understand his vocation as a priest.

During the winter of that year he met another person in agony. This person was about to die and wanted to believe in God’s gentleness, but he felt like they could not talk to God. He just wanted to meet the right priest, and this man felt God through Vincent that night.

Vincent finally wanted to give up his lavish life and told Bishop Berulle how he felt. He was moved to a parish between Lyon and Geneva. As he was preparing for mass one day, he was told there was an entirely ill family and no one could take care of them. He asked the parishioners to help. It was nice, but not organized. He was called back to the Gondi family in Paris, so Vincent started up his charity association there.

He wanted his priests sent to rural areas to care for the poor. This was the mission for The Congregation, which he founded on April 17, 1625. The men took care of diseased and homeless people. It needed to be organized though. After much prayer, Vincent met Louise de Marillac and asked her to organize The Congregation. In 1629, she began completely organizing the daughters of Charity and Vincent’s Congregation. He said, “Follow Him, don’t try to go before Him,” to Louise in regards to her relationship with God and her spiritual direction.

He sent missionaries all over the world. Vincent worked so hard for the mission because he wanted God’s gentleness to reach as many people as he could possibly reach ever since he met that man in agony that one winter.

In 1644, Vincent became terribly ill. His legs became super swollen c. 1650 and Vincent had to walk with a cane. A few months later, he lost the ability to walk. His legs oozed blood and he could no longer eat food. He was brought to the chapel to receive communion at mass, and received the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick after it. That morning he gave his final blessing to the mission priests and daughters of charity and died on September 27, 1660.

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**Feast Day:** September 27

**Patron of:** Charitable Organizations
St. Catherine Labore
The Miraculous Medal is the most popular, common medallion that we have associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary. We have this medal because St. Catherine Labore saw it in a vision. This vision changed the way we as Catholics look at our relationship with Mother Mary.

Catherine was born in 1806 in Fain-les-Moutiers to a farmer family. They lived in the Burgundy countryside. She was number eight out of her nine siblings. Because her mother died in 1815, Catherine entrusted herself to Mary at a young age. When she was twelve years old, Catherine worked on the farm and was unable to attend school. Because of this she did not learn how to read or write until she was eighteen years old.

At this point of her life, Catherine wanted to consecrate her life to God and those living in poverty, but her father disapproved of this. He sent her to Paris to work as a cook and servant in a popular restaurant that her brother owned. Her father never could have dreamed to have given her an opportunity to learn about the unemployed workers, families without money, and children who had to work at the age of seven in Paris. This was a result of the rising capitalism in France at the time and Catherine knew where she wanted to go to help these people.

Catherine joined the Daughters of Charity in 1830. Her father finally softened up and gave her permission. She was twenty-four years old and began her formation at the motherhouse in Paris. St. Vincent de Paul was a huge inspiration of strength and patience for her. In her service to others, Catherine was always joyful. She did her best to understand people and their situations.

Mary appeared to Catherine in the chapel of the Motherhouse on July 18, 1830. During the first apparition of Mary, Catherine was given news of a future mission. Mary asked her to pray for humanity, especially for an end to violence and suffering. Mary said to Catherine, “Come to the foot of the altar. There graces will be poured out on all who ask with confidence.”

On November 27 of that year, Mary appeared to her again, resplendent in reflecting God’s beauty. She held a small golden globe with a cross on top with rays of light beaming from her hands. Catherine saw this vision as if it were in a picture frame. Written around the frame were the words, “Oh Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.” The frame twirled for her and on the backside there was an elegant letter “M” with a cross sitting on top of it. She had a double-sided medal made with this image on it. This medal is known today as the Miraculous Medal of Mary.

She told this to a priest during confession and he told her not to speak of it again. The medal became popular though. So many healings and conversions came from this medal that it became known as the miraculous medal.

In 1831, Catherine was sent to serve in an elderly home in Enghien. She was peaceful and loving to everyone around her. She treated all with exceptional thoughtfulness, kindness, and compassion. She showed special care for the sick and saw the face of Christ in each one of the members of the community. Catherine passed away on December 31, 1876.

Catherine was a first witness of a new kind of holiness, without glory or human triumph. The Holy Spirit created this new form of ordinary holiness for the days to come, which extends to our days in the twenty first century. In 1854, Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. This was because of Catherine and the special grace of the mission that Mary gave her. If that wasn’t abundantly clear, Mary appeared in Lourdes four years later to a girl named Bernadette and literally told her, “I am the Immaculate Conception.”
Lisieux
Visit on:
January 24

**Basilica of St Therese**
- Reliquary of St. Therese
- Reliquary of Louis and Zelie Martin

**The Carmel Convent of Lisieux**
- Reliquary of St. Therese

*Taken at the Basilica of St. Therese, Lisieux, France.*
Sts. Louis & Zelie Martin
Louis and Zadie are the power couple of the Church and their story starts in 1830 when Captain Pierre Martin retired from the army and settled his family in Alencon, Normandy. He wanted to raise his family in the faith. This was Louis’ father, and Louis at a young age cared about his studies, and learned to appreciate his ability to read. Although he did have a secondary school education, he learned the skill of assembling and making clocks and watches. For some time he moved to his cousin Louis’ house in Rennes to learn the art of clock making.

In the workshop in Rennes, he learned the Breton lifestyle, and he liked it. He had an apprenticeship of five years with his cousin and continued going when he was finished with the apprenticeship. Taking a break from his studies, he went on pilgrimage to the Monastery of St. Bernard in the Alps for some time with God.

Azelie Guerin was born on December 23, 1831. Her father also retired from the army, and settled in Alancon. Zelie was always a little weak when she was young. She got many headaches and emotionally hurt from her mother because she felt that she did not love her.

She and her sister desired the religious life. Her sister eventually became a Visitation nun at Le Mans. Zelie wanted to give her life completely to God so she sought the advice of a Sister of Charity, but the sister did not think that Zelie was called to become a sister. Deeply disappointed, Zelie accepted it with faith that God would give her a husband despite her inability to afford a dowry for a wedding.

She asked Mary for help. On the Immaculate Conception of 1851, Zelie heard a voice say, “See to making of Point d’Alencon.” She decided to learn the skill of making lace because of this. She met Louis’ mother at one of the classes. She pursued lacemaking and learned the art of the business of lace. Zelie was not interested in the commercial side of business even though she was financially soaring. She ended her private business to work for a Pigache company.

One fateful day she saw a man on a bridge. She heard a voice say to her, “This is he whom I have been preparing for you.” She understood that she would marry Louis the minute she saw him. He desired the religious life though. After attempting to join the monastery of the Alps, the studies required for it got in the way of his watchmaking skill. Louis chose to become a master of the trade instead of studying to become a priest. He knew what he wanted. After mastering the trade of watchmaking, he opened a business in Alancon. He always put God first in the business. He closed his watch and clock shop on Sundays without it as a loss.

They were engaged for a short time and were married three months after meeting each other. During the first ten months of their marriage they abstained from sex in an attempt to imitate the Holy Family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. A priest approached them though, and explained the Church’s teaching on marriage and how important it was for them to intimately grow together in that relationship. About a month after speaking with him Zelie was pregnant.

Throughout their marriage were numerous trials and tests of faith. Disease was far more common during their time and because of that lots of prayer was needed. Faithfully, Louis and Zelie endured every trial of marriage with undoubted faith in God. They had seven girls and two boys and buried the boys and two of the girls. After every birth, Zelie became weaker and she died in August 27, 1880 because of it.

With five girls, Louis moved to Lisieux and raised them there. The girls eventually became Nuns. Two of them cared for him before entering their orders though because Louis had cerebral paralysis and suffered from hallucinations. This led him to the Bon Sauveur Home at Caen to be cared for as mentally ill. He eventually had a heart attack at the age of sixty-four and suffered after that until he died on July 29, 1894.
St. Therese of Lisieux
Therese is the saint that many people associate with priests because she is usually the one who helps young men discover their vocation to the priesthood. There are also many statues of her in churches throughout the world. She usually holds a crucifix with roses. She is Therese the Little Flower that everyone talks about!

Therese was born in Alcon France in 1873. Her parents were Sts. Louis and Zadie Martin. She had eight siblings, but three of them died before she could hardly walk. As a young girl, Therese lost her mother, and her older sister joined a convent. Then, she came down with a fever. When she was in her sickbed she saw her sisters praying to a statue of Mary in her room. She saw the statue smile at her and was immediately cured of her fatal fever.

Therese was a sensitive girl and she cried if anything disturbed her. She felt she could not handle the life of a Carmelite nun. She prayed for Jesus to help her. On Christmas in 1886, her sister Celine asked her to leave her shoes out with hers by the hearth because she did not want her to grow up. Her father’s voice carried upstairs though. He said, “Thank goodness that’s the last time we have to do this,” and Therese did not cry. Her prayers were answered right there. She described it as Jesus coming into her heart to allow her to control her emotions.

The summer after, Therese learned that a man Henri Pranzini was convicted of murdering two children and a woman. He was sentenced to death by the guillotine in Paris, and according to the news he did not repent. Therese felt her prayers could convert this man. For weeks she prayed and offered mass for him. It was not until right before his death that he asked for a crucifix. He kissed the wounds of Jesus three times.

When Therese asked the Carmelite convent superior if she could join the order, she said no because she was too young. The bishop said no when she asked him too. Then, Louis took her and Celine to Rome on pilgrimage. During the papal audience she ran through the crowds and begged the Pope to let her join the Carmelites. Two guards carried her out as a result. The Vicar General of the Vatican gave her the answer of yes because of how spunky she was.

She joined the convent. She fell asleep in prayer because she was so upset about her father having seizures right after she entered. She also knew she could never do great deeds so she had to love by using every little sacrifice she could muster. She smiled at the sisters who she did not like. She never complained.

Her sister Pauline became prioress of the convent, and the politics of the convent were at stake when she did. Her sister asked Therese to stay a novice so that the other sisters in the convent would not have to fear their family taking over it. This was the biggest sacrifice that Therese ever made. This meant she could never fully profess herself as a nun and that she would always have to ask permission for everything.

She said yes, but she worried about how she could obtain holiness. All she wanted was to be a saint. She felt that she was nowhere near the same as the saints that she learned about, but she knew God would not give her the desire to become a saint if it was not possible.

In 1896, she coughed up blood. Therese soon became so ill that she could not work. She tried to stay cheerful, but underneath her cheeriness she was suffering. Some even thought she was only pretending to be ill because she was so cheerful. As death was closing in on her, Therese felt she would do many works on earth from heaven. With that, she died on September 30, 1897 at the age of twenty-four years old.

Therese felt that she had the vocation of the priesthood within her, but she knew she could not become a priest because she was a woman. She believed if she were a man she would have been ordained a priest by the age that she died and that is why God let her die so young.
Meaux
Reliquary the relics of St. Fiacre are kept and venerated in the Meaux Cathedral, Meaux, France.
St. Fiacre

SAN FIACRE
PATRON DE LOS JARDINEROS
For all you gardeners out there, Fiacre is the man for you. He is the patron saint of gardens so if those squirrels are eating your tomatoes again you know who to send up a prayer to.

Fiacre was born in the early 7th century to a wealthy Irish Family. He was a son of a king and was raised with his brothers by Bishop Conon of Iona in a monastery. He learned much about herbs and healing plants at the monastery.

As a young man, Fiacre left his illustrious life for one of solitude. He sought out Bishop Faro of Meaux, France. Bishop Faro directed him to the forest called Breuil. Within this forest, he built an oratory to honor the Virgin Mary. He began a life of simplicity and put things like his relationship with Mary at a high priority there. He also built a hospice there where he would treat and care for travelling strangers. He cured many people simply by the virtue of his prayer. Fiacre lived a simple life in a single cell, which involved prayer and manual labor in his garden.

Legend says that he asked Bishop Faro for more ground to plant his food and herbs. Bishop Faro told him he could have as much land as he could trench in one day. Fiacre prayed and his crosier was miraculously able to topple trees, dig up briers and weeds, and prepare the land to perfection to plant a garden.

A local woman accused Fiacre of sorcery when she witnessed him do this miracle, but Bishop Faro saw that only a man of God could accomplish such a feat through the strength of God and not sorcery. Because of this woman, Fiacre banned all women from his monastery that he eventually built after he worked this miracle. It was custom at that time for women not to enter Irish monasteries anyway, but it could have happened as the legend says it did. This is a tradition that has been upheld to this day at his monastery in honor of his memory.

In hearing of Fiacre’s miracle, unlike the woman who accused him of sorcery, people flocked to him and his monastery. People sought food, healing, prayers, and wisdom from this man of great faith. He grew fruit and vegetables to feed those in need that came to him. He also grew herbs and flowers to serve him in his healing works and remedies. Pilgrims brought seeds and plants from all over to Fiacre’s garden so that he could grow even more herbs and flowers. It became much more famous and diverse because of the pilgrims’ generosity.

At some point, the throne of Scotland became vacant. Deputies from Scotland came to Breuil to ask him to return to become king. Fiacre with complete understanding that he could go back to his old illustrious life denied their request. Fiacre decided that his new life would be the life that he absolutely wanted, and his mind could not be swayed by wealth.

Fiacre died on August 30, 670 and was buried in the chapel that he built himself. Today, his shrine in Breuil is still a pilgrimage spot for those seeking relief from their ailments. I was unable to visit Breuil, but there is a reliquary dedicated to him and several other saints in the Meaux Cathedral that I venerated him at.

Feast Day: August 30

Patron of:
- Gardeners
- Taxi Drivers
Nevers
Visit on:
April 30

**Saint Gildard Convent**
▲ Relic of the incorrupt body of St. Bernadette Soubirous
St. Bernadette Soubirous
St. Bernadette is an inspiration of blind faith. It does not make sense, everyone thinks you’re crazy, but you do what you do because of your blind faith in God. For anyone ridiculed for being passionate for what they do, they can take a tip from this amazing girl.

Bernadette was born to a devoted, loving family on January 7, 1844. Her family went into poverty shortly after her birth. They were forced to live in a single room, which used to be a prison cell, as their house. This room was usually deemed unsanitary for the prisoners who used to live in it. Bernadette was not properly educated either.

Bernadette’s first vision of Mary happened on February 11 in 1858. She stumbled upon a grotto filled with washed up trash from the river as she was collecting firewood. Her friends left her alone in the grotto. Bernadette was taking off her stockings when suddenly a lady dressed in white, wearing a blue girdle, a yellow rose on each foot, holding a rosary with a yellow chain and white beads stood there before her.

At first Bernadette was confused, but soon she felt peace. Her friends kept poking at her until she told them about what she saw. She pleaded with them not to tell anyone, but they told her parents anyway. She wasn’t allowed to go back. She would normally obey her parents, but Bernadette felt her gut telling her to go back. After mass on the next Sunday, she went back. After that, she saw her several more times.

At the ninth apparition, the Lady asked Bernadette to drink from the spring, but there was no spring in sight. Bernadette dug and found a muddy patch and drank the muddy water. She obeyed when the Lady asked her to eat some grass too. Many thought she was a fraud and that she was crazy when they witnessed this.

As the days went by though, a spring bubbled up where she dug. People had miraculous healing experiences from this spring too. The Lady asked Bernadette to ask the parish priest to build a chapel at the site of the grotto. Father Dominique Peyramale was quite skeptical. He wanted to know her name. Bernadette asked and she only smiled without answering. Finally on March 25, she gave an answer, saying, “I am the Immaculate Conception.” Bernadette told the priest without understanding much of what this meant. He was amazed at hearing this. Two apparitions later she said goodbye. The lady gave Bernadette one last request and that was for Bernadette to keep a secret and never tell anyone what it was. She obeyed faithfully.

After the apparitions, Bernadette sought a religious cloistered life. She never wanted glory or fame for being chosen by the Blessed Mother. For a couple of years, pilgrims, skeptics, and nonbelievers visited her to hear the story. They wanted to hear from the source of it all. Every time she recounted the story, she was completely sincere and humble to whomever she spoke with. She ended up entering a convent in Nevers, France. She took her vows as Sister Marie Bernarde. She lived a simple life as a nun, and often suffered from ill health. She always remained cheerful through it all though.

She felt she was very ignorant. Bernadette recounted how she did not even know what the lady meant when she said she was the Immaculate Conception. She always called herself the stupid one and felt unworthy of the graces she received, but her spirituality was clearly evident every time she made the sign of the cross.

Bernadette suffered from ailments and afflictions and she could not even live out the convent life for a few months. On April 16, 1879, at the age of thirty-five, Bernadette prayed the rosary in her bed. She said the sign of the cross, drank some water, and died there.
Poland
Visit on:
April 7–10

Places Visited:
★ Krakow
★ Auschwitz

Taken at the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy, Krakow, Poland.
Krakow
Visit on:
April 7–9

**Wawel Cathedral**
- Tomb of St. Jadwiga (Hedwig)

**Divine Mercy Sanctuary**
- Tomb of St. Faustina Kowalska

**Sanctuary of St. John Paul II**
- Relic of St. John Paul II

Divine Mercy Shrine where the relics of St. Faustina Kowalska are kept and venerated in Krakow, Poland.
St. Jadwiga
( Hedwig)
One day, years ago, I looked up St. Hedwig on the Internet because Harry Potter’s owl was named after her. I had no idea I would have the privilege to visit the actual place where her tomb was. I also even forgot she was a Polish saint.

Jadwiga is the Polish spelling of her name and she was born in Buda, 1374. Her father was King Louis d’Anjou of Hungary and Poland and her mother was Elizabeth of Bosnia. Jadwiga was a beautiful young girl with red hair. At a young age she was told she would marry the son of Leopold of Austria, Wilhelm.

In 1382, plans for her marriage changed because her father died. Two years later, she was crowned the King of Poland. She came to Krakow a year after she was crowned. The politicians negotiated with the Grand Duke, Jogaila of Lithuania and wanted Jadwiga to marry him to expand the Polish boundaries and Christianity to Lithuania. She wanted to marry Wilhelm though. She sought help from the Bishop of Krakow, but he explained that she had an opportunity to make a huge sacrifice for Christianity in Europe. With Jesus as her last hope, she prayed to Him on the crucifix in the Wawel Cathedral in Krakow.

She heard Jesus speak to her from the cross saying, “Do what you see.” Jogaila agreed to be baptized with the name Wladyslaw if he were to marry her and also agreed to encourage the conversion of his pagan subjects in Lithuania as well. Jadwiga saw, and agreed to marry him three days after his conversion to the faith. He gained the title of King of Poland and she received her new title of Queen.

She had to let go of her love for Wilhelm and she really began to care for fostering the faith in Lithuania. She organized a special group at the University of Prague for newly formed Lithuanian princes. She reconciled with any Lithuanians who did not want to be a part of Poland under the new united country. People easily liked her because of her kindness and compassionate love. She had a huge heart for her subjects and she funded many hospitals and churches of Krakow, including the Carmelite Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

According to legend, Queen Jadwiga saw a very sad worker one day and approached him. She learned that his wife was ill and close to death. He was unable to afford the treatment to save her life with his job as a construction worker. She pulled off her slipper and unfastened the golden buckle from it and gave it to him. Her foot leaned against the stone covered with lime as she was doing this. Her foot left an impression on this stone, which he placed into the wall in the church as a testament to her generosity.

Her relationship with Jesus was extremely important to her, and Jadwiga prayed, fasted, and made efforts to spread the Word of God as far and wide as she could. She funded a translation of the Bible and writings of the fathers of the church for the Wawel Cathedral. She also loved praising God through the psalms and established a Psalterist College of sixteen people to praise God. She gave some of her fortune to renew and expand the Academy of Krakow and even asked the Pope for permission to open a theology department in the Academy of Krakow.

At the Wawel Cathedral, Jadwiga prayed to Jesus through the same black crucifix that He had spoken to her through when she was conflicted about her marriage whenever she needed to make important choices. The decisions she made based upon her prayer time here usually helped to stabilize Poland and allowed it to prosper for the next few hundred years.

Wladyslaw truly loved Jadwiga, and she grew to love him too, but it was difficult to get to that point because she was originally in love with Wilhelm. Wladyslaw wanted an heir so they tried having a child and Jadwiga had a girl. Tragically her daughter died within three weeks of her birth and Jadwiga did two days after her birth because of complications from giving birth. She was buried in Wawel Cathedral in 1399.

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**Feast Day:**
June 8

**Patron of:**
- Queens
- United Europe
St. Faustina is one of the most inspirational saints of the twentieth century. If you’ve ever seen a painting or picture of the Divine Mercy Jesus, she is the reason why. Helena Kowalska was born on August 25, 1905 to a poor family in a small village west of Lodz, Poland. She was the third out of her nine siblings. When she was young she preferred to spend her free time with the Blessed Sacrament of Jesus. She only attended school for three years because her family needed her to help financially support them. She got a job as a housekeeper.

When Faustina was seventeen years old, she knew she wanted to devote her life to Jesus, but when she asked her parents if she could enter the religious life, they said no, despite being a religious family. At the time that she lived in if someone’s child entered a convent the loss to the family was the equivalent to that of losing a child’s life because the parents of the child would never see her again once she entered. It was an extremely serious commitment.

She was persistent though and they eventually allowed her to enter the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy on August 1, 1925. She was given her habit and her name Sister Maria Faustina a year later. The sisters of mercy mainly worked with, counseled, and helped troubled young women in anything that they could possibly struggle with. In 1928 she took her vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, and officially became a Sister of Mercy. Because she loved Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament so much, she added, “of the Most Blessed Sacrament” to her name. She had freckles and red fiery hair to match her passionate, fiery personality. She wasted no time in loving. Time was extremely important to Faustina and she wished to love everyone and to show God’s mercy to others every minute of every day.

Jesus chose her as his special in the 1930s. He appeared to Sister Faustina in a mystical vision where he asked her to spread a message of mercy into the world as his apostle and secretary of mercy. This was a time when people lived in despair and felt they could not believe the Lord would forgive them. Jesus wished to tell the world that it needs his mercy and this especially applies to us today. This was one of 280 mystical experiences of Jesus that Faustina had in Krakow, which is where her convent was. Jesus regularly appeared to her whenever she went to pray at the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. She saw Mary and the Angels during these mystical experiences of Jesus too.

She wrote a diary compiling all these experiences into one place. According to #1312 in her journal, one instance where she encountered Jesus was on a cold, rainy day. A young man without a jacket or shoes rang the bell at the gate of the convent asking for soup. Like she always did, Sister Faustina went to the kitchen and got him a meager cup of soup. The soup was special though because of her great love. The young man transformed into Jesus before her eyes. He said that he kept hearing people praise God for the small, mediocre cup of soup that they received from the convent. They praised God because of Sister Faustina’s love and Jesus wanted her to know that. The bell he rang is still there today, but is in a glass case to prevent pilgrims from ringing it all day.

Jesus had Faustina write everything down in that diary so that the world could learn of his divine mercy, especially the sinners who were and are afraid of God’s mercy. Jesus also had Faustina describe the image of Him that she saw to a painter so that His mercy could be associated with the image of Himself that Faustina saw.

Faustina, after seeing Jesus in these visions so many times came down with tuberculosis in 1938. She offered all of her sufferings for the sinners of the whole world and passed away at the age of thirty-three to be in union with Jesus. Faustina began the Divine Mercy devotion and now we have the Divine Mercy Chaplet prayed all over the world for all the sinners of the world because of her. She constantly calls us to love Jesus more and dig deeper into His mercy.
St. John Paul II
Pope John Paul II is one of the most inspirational people of our lifetime. He has done so much for the church to progress forward, and I would not even be writing this book if he had not invented World Youth Day in the 1980s. He was born with the name Karol Wajtyla on May 18, 1920 in Wadowice, not too far from Krakow. At the age of nine, his mother passed away. From that moment on Karol dedicated himself to Mother Mary whom he decided would be his new mother.

Just a few years later his brother Edmund passed on as well. His father showed him how to cope with these losses through his faith. His father always taught Karol about the importance of faith. Some nights Karol would wake up and see his father on his knees, praying. As a young man, he was a soccer player, an actor, and he even liked to swim and ski. Karol was extremely into poetry at his college too. There was nothing super holy about a man who was an actor and athlete. For a young person like me, it is quite easy to relate to a man like him.

During WWII, Karol attended a secret seminary, and the year after the end of the war he was ordained a priest in the Wawel Cathedral in Krakow. Throughout his early priest years he worked in several parishes in Krakow. He eventually became a bishop, an archbishop, and finally in 1967 he was chosen to be a cardinal by Pope Paul VI. Karol was a huge contributor to the Second Vatican Council as a cardinal.

The way he was elevated was that he was the leader of a diocese, which is a group of churches in an area. He did a good job so he was promoted to an archdiocese, which simply means a bigger dioceses, and the special thing about being picked as a cardinal is that the pope himself picks this person who has shown great leadership to be part of this special group of bishops who attempt to lead the church in the best fashion that they can.

In 1978, Karol Wajtyla was voted to become the next pope of the Roman Catholic Church. He chose the name, John Paul II after the popes who started the Second Vatican council. He was determined to finish it and he was also the first non-Italian pope in over four hundred years.

Pope John Paul II did more travelling than any other pope has done. He attempted to spread the gospel to more than one hundred countries. He was a huge activist to stop communism too.

Pope John Paul II had a motto during his papacy and this was “Totus Tuus.” This means, “I am totally yours.” He said this in regards to his relationship with the Virgin Mary. Ever since he was a child he had a relationship with her and this motto meant that he was totally hers to give to Jesus and the world. He loved his spiritual Mother Mary, and wished that everyone would kindle and grown in a relationship with her so that she could bring everyone to Jesus.

In 1981, a man attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II. The assassin was interviewed and he said that he never missed a target. That day when he shot Pope John Paul II in St. Peter’s Square, he aimed perfectly at his heart. John Paul II attributed his spared life to Our Lady of Fatima because he believed that Our Lady’s hand swooped in to nudge the bullets so that they could not kill him. After he healed, John Paul II went to visit the imprisoned man, and forgave him for attempting to kill him.

He is an inspiration of bold faith with his ability to forgive. He also encourages the youth to be bold in faith, which is why he created World Youth Day in 1987. Every two to three years the youth of the world gathers with the pope for a week of bold witness and praise of the faith because of this man. Because of this he is also the patron saint of World Youth Day.

In 2001, he was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease and for the next four years, Pope John Paul II suffered from this disease. He powered through it though and offered every minute of suffering to Jesus. He died on April 2, 2005 at the age of eighty-four years old.
Visit on:
April 10

Auschwitz Memorial Museum

Memorial in remembrance of St. Maximillian Kolbe

Memorial in remembrance of Father Maximillan Kolbe in the cell he died in, Block 11, Auschwitz, Poland.
St. Maximilian Kolbe
My youth minister Nolan first showed me St. Maximilian Kolbe. He loves this guy and when he first told me his story I had chills go down my spine, so I hope he moves your heart too! He was born with the name Raymond Kolbe was born on January 8, 1894 in Poland. When he was twelve years old, he had a vision of the Virgin Mary. When she appeared to him she brought him two crowns. One was red and one was white. She said the white meant purity and the red meant martyrdom. She asked which he would pick and he boldly chose both crowns.

A year after this he and his brother Francis joined the Conventional Franciscan Friars, a religious order. In 1910, he was given the name Maximilian, and one year later he made his first vows as a brother. When he was twenty-one years old, Maximilian received a doctorate in philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and received his doctorate in theology seven years after at the University of St. Bonaventure. After completing his studies, he was ordained a priest in the newly independent Poland in Niepokalanów near Warsaw in 1919. Toward the end of his studies he came down with tuberculosis. Ever since then, he experienced poor health without complaint because he offered it all as a suffering for Mary, the Immaculata. He created the Militia for the Immaculata, which was a group of men who fought for Mary and for the conversion of sinners through prayer. Maximilian started this group after he saw angry free masons at the Vatican in Rome. Fr. Kolbe and the Friars published pamphlets, books, and even a newspaper to combat them. He also gained a radio license to broadcast from in Poland. The magazine gained over one million subscribers.

In 1930, Fr. Kolbe visited Japan on mission where he founded a monastery on the outskirts of Nagasaki. He engaged in dialogue with the Buddhist priests there and learned a bit about martial arts and how they benefitted from it. He became too ill though and had to return to Poland not too soon after.

When the Nazis overtook Poland in 1939, he was arrested under suspicion. Upon being freed, Fr. Kolbe went back to his monastery where he helped house and feed 3000 refugees. 2000 of them were Jewish. He illegally broadcasted on his radio from the monastery against the Nazis too. Kolbe was discovered and arrested though. He was sent to Auschwitz, the concentration camp. There, he carried the heaviest of planks, was beaten severely, and brutally singled out by his overseer. Kolbe offered it all to the Immaculata, Mary though. Not once did he despair. In fact Kolbe kept moral up. He constantly gave support to the other prisoners in prayer and example throughout his time there.

In July 1941, three prisoners escaped. The punishment for this was that ten prisoners would be starved to death to reinforce how they should not try to escape the prison. One of the prisoners was Franciszek Gajowniczek and he cried for his wife and kids. Kolbe approached the Nazi and told him that since he was a weak priest he would like to take the man’s place. He pointed out that the man was young and strong and would labor way better than Kolbe could. The Nazi ignored him so Kolbe repeated himself. The Nazi allowed him to take his place.

The ten men were sentenced to death by starvation in block 11 of Auschwitz. Witnesses say that the cell sounded like a church from the hymns that Fr. Kolbe sang. He prayed with the other prisoners as they awaited death. Eventually, he was the only one left alive in the cell, naked and starving. The Nazis needed the cell to kill more prisoners, so they gave him a lethal injection to end his life. Fr. Kolbe was a martyr for the faith, a true witness of God. His body was cremated like all the other prisoners. Franciszek Gajowniczek lived for another fifty years and attended Kolbe’s canonization in the Vatican in 1981.
Thank you.
I began this project thinking of writing about just five saints. Times five by ten and you have fifty inspirational saints to learn from. It really is amazing how God takes our ideas and makes them more incredible than we ever could make them. It was me who did it, but God showed me I am more capable than I think I am. I just kept drafting upon drafting. At some point I thought I’d never get it to where it should be. My thoughts and direction finally came to the right place in the end though.

This is just the start of the saint books though. I plan on going in depth for the saints I have the best connections with. I’m excited for the future, but for the present too! I’d like to thank Professor De Luna for guiding me through this design problem and process, no matter how frustrated I became. I know you had no idea I was writing about this many saints so thanks for the encouragement!

Thank you to Mom and Dad for allowing me to study abroad to accomplish this adventure. A proper thank you will never be enough for all the nights I kept you up, Mom.

I’d like to thank all the friends who accompanied me on some of these adventures. Thank you Mark, Mike, and Nick especially for that weekend in Siena, Pisa, and Florence.

Thank you Cindy for introducing me to Padre Pio and taking me to Assisi with the Padre Pio Prayer group from Ohio.

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Thank you to my friends and family who have encouraged me and supported me in this project. Thanks for the prayers for safety too!

Thank you to all the European Transportation from Tren Italia, to EasyJet Airlines. I was always safe and it was thanks to the security of St. John’s University and the people of Europe.

Thank you God for my artistic abilities and a big thank you to the saints who have inspired me throughout this project. Y’all called me and I answered with a blind yes.

Thank YOU, the reader for accompanying me on this journey as well. I have a yearning in my heart to tell the world how amazing my God and his people are and I hope you have taken something from this.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” Matthew 28:19 fits perfectly here. God called his saints to go out to all the nations and He calls us to do the same! That’s a wrap. God bless!

Matthew Smith: designed, wrote, photographed, and drew for this book.

Fonts used:

• Univers 45 Light
• Univers 55 Roman
• Univers 65 Bold
• Bequeath Regular
• Bequeath Black
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Louis and Zelie Martin Parents of Therese of Lisieux by Fr. Paulinus Redmond
God Called me.
I said yes to his adventure in the Spring of 2015.