

HEROES

Witness of the Saints and Martyrs, Purpose of Sacrifice and Suffering

ST. AUGUSTINE

ST. AUGUSTINE “The Rebel”

Biography (taken from catholic.org)

St. Augustine of Hippo is the patron of brewers because of his conversion from a former life of loose living, which included parties, entertainment and worldly ambitions. His complete conversion has been an inspiration to many who struggle with a particular vice or habit they long to break.

This famous son of St. Monica was born in Africa and spent many years of his life in wicked living and false beliefs. Though he was one of the most intelligent men who ever lived and had been brought up a Christian, his sins of impurity and his pride darkened his mind so much, that he could not see or understand the Divine Truth anymore. Through the prayers of his holy mother and the marvelous preaching of St. Ambrose, Augustine finally became convinced that Christianity was the one true religion. Yet he did not become a Christian then, because he thought he could never live a pure life.

Full of bitter sorrow, Augustine flung himself out into the garden and cried out to God, “How long more, O Lord? Why does not this hour put an end to my sins?” Just then he heard a child singing, “Take up and read!” Thinking that God intended him to hear those words, he picked up the book of the Letters of St. Paul, and read the first passage his gaze fell on. It was just what Augustine needed, for in it, St. Paul says to put away all impurity and to live in imitation of Jesus. That did it! From then on, Augustine began a new life.

He was baptized, became a priest, a bishop, a famous Catholic writer, founder of religious orders, and one of the greatest saints that ever lived. He became very devout and charitable too. On the wall of his room he had the following sentence written in large letters: “Here we do not speak evil of anyone.” St. Augustine challenged strong heresies, practiced great poverty, supported the poor, preached very often and prayed with great fervor right up until his death. His feast day is August 28th.

Discussion Questions

- Why do people find it difficult to change even when they know their actions are wrong?
- Augustine had his mother continually calling him to holiness. Who is the person in your life that challenges you spiritually?
- What is one obstacle that is keeping you from living for God more completely?

St. Augustine’s Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy. Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy. Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy. Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen.

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ST. GIANNA BERETTA MOLLA

ST. GIANNA BERETTA MOLLA "The Super-Mom"

Biography (taken from Vatican.va)

Gianna Beretta was born in Milan October 4, 1922. Already as a youth she willingly accepted the gift of faith and the clearly Christian education that she received from her excellent parents. After earning degrees in Medicine and Surgery from the University of Pavia in 1949, she opened a medical clinic in 1950. She specialized in Pediatrics at the University of Milan in 1952 and there after gave special attention to mothers, babies, the elderly and poor.

She became engaged to Pietro Molla and was radiant with joy and happiness during the time of their engagement, for which she thanked and praised the Lord. They were married on September 24, 1955, in the Basilica of St. Martin in Magenta, and she became a happy wife. By 1959, the couple had three children. With simplicity and equilibrium she harmonized the demands of mother, wife, doctor and her passion for life.

In September 1961 toward the end of the second month of her fourth pregnancy, she had developed a fibroma in her uterus. Before the required surgical operation, she pleaded with the surgeon to save the life of the child she was carrying, and entrusted herself to prayer and Providence. The life was saved, for which she thanked the Lord. She spent the seven months remaining until the birth of the child in incomparable strength of spirit and unrelenting dedication to her tasks as mother and doctor.

A few days before the child was due, although trusting as always in Providence, she was ready to give her life in order to save that of her child: "If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate: choose the child - I insist on it. Save him". On the morning of April 21, 1962, Gianna Emanuela was born. Despite all efforts and treatments to save both of them, on the morning of April 28, amid unspeakable pain and after repeated exclamations of "Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you", the mother died. She was 39 years old.

Discussion Questions

- The daughter that St. Gianna gave her life for was at her mother's canonization in 2004. What do you think she felt that day?
- What is the biggest sacrifice someone has made for you?
- What is the biggest sacrifice you have made for someone else?

Novena to St. Gianna

Lord of life, we thank You for the heroic witness of Saint Gianna Beretta Molla. You have taught us that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for others. Saint Gianna did this, not only as she gave birth to her last child, but also in her everyday life as she died to herself so that she could live wholly for You. What selflessness we see in her! Help us, we pray, that through the intercession of Saint Gianna, our society may regain a sense of the sacredness of all human life. Fill us with her spirit of courage to suffer any struggle rather than deny You and the sanctity of human life. We ask You this through our Lord, Jesus Christ, your son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

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ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE "Momma's Boy"

Biography (taken from catholic.org)

Maximilian was born in 1894 in Poland and became a Franciscan. He contracted tuberculosis and, though he recovered, he remained frail all his life. Before his ordination as a priest, Maximilian founded the Immaculata Movement devoted to Our Lady. After receiving a doctorate in theology, he spread the Movement through a magazine entitled "The Knight of the Immaculata" and helped form a community of 800 men, the largest in the world.

Maximilian went to Japan where he built a comparable monastery and then on to India where he furthered the Movement. In 1936 he returned home because of ill health. After the Nazi invasion in 1939, he was imprisoned and released for a time. But in 1941 he was arrested again and sent to the concentration camp at Auschwitz.

During the Second World War, in the friary, Kolbe provided shelter to refugees from Greater Poland, including 2,000 Jews whom he hid from Nazi persecution. On February 17, 1941, he was arrested by the German Gestapo and imprisoned in the Pawiak prison, and, on May 25, was transferred to Auschwitz I as prisoner #16670.

In July 1941, a man from Kolbe's barracks had vanished, prompting the camp commander, to pick 10 men from the same barracks to be starved to death, in order to deter further escape attempts. One of the selected men, Franciszek Gajowniczek, cried out, lamenting his family, and Kolbe volunteered to take his place.

During the time in the cell, he led the men in songs and prayer. After three weeks of dehydration and starvation, only Kolbe and three others were still alive. Finally, he was executed with an injection of carbolic acid. He was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1981. His feast day is August 14th.

Discussion Questions

- What about Father Kolbe's story stands out to you?
- Kolbe had a great love and devotion to Mary. Describe your relationship with our Blessed Mother.
- Kolbe continued to pray and praise God even when being starved to death. What is your typical reaction to suffering?

Novena Prayer to St. Maximilian Kolbe

O Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "greater love than this no man has that a man lay down his life for his friends," through the intercession of St. Maximilian Kolbe whose life illustrated such love, we ask you to grant us our petitions . . . Through the Militia Immaculata movement, which Maximilian founded, he spread a fervent devotion to Our Lady throughout the world. He gave up his life for a total stranger and loved his persecutors, giving us an example of unselfish love for all men - a love that was inspired by true devotion to Mary. Grant, O Lord Jesus, that we too may give ourselves entirely without reserve to the love and service of our Heavenly Queen in order to better love and serve our fellow man in imitation of your humble servant, Maximilian. Amen.

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ST. MARIA GORETTI

ST. MARIA GORETTI "True Love's Victim"

Biography (taken from catholic.org)

Born in Corinaldo, Ancona, Italy, on October 16, 1890; her farm worker father moved his family to Ferrier di Conca, near Anzio. Her father died of malaria and her mother had to struggle to feed her children.

In 1902 when Maria was 11, an 18-year-old neighbor, Alexander, grabbed her from her steps and tried to rape her. When Maria said that she would rather die than submit, Alexander began stabbing her with a knife. As she lay in the hospital, she forgave Alexander before she died. Her death didn't end her forgiveness, however.

Alexander was captured and sentenced to thirty years. He was unrepentant until he had a dream that he was in a garden. Maria was there and gave him flowers. When he woke, he was a changed man, repenting of his crime and living a reformed life. When he was released after 27 years he went directly to Maria's mother to beg her forgiveness, which she gave. She said, "If my daughter can forgive him, who am I to withhold forgiveness?"

When Maria was declared a saint in 1950, Alexander was there in the St. Peter's crowd to celebrate her canonization. She was canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1950 for her purity as model for youth.

She is called a martyr because she fought against Alexander's attempts at sexual assault. However, the most important aspect of her story is her forgiveness of her attacker -- her concern for her enemy extended even beyond death. Her feast day is July 6.

Discussion Questions

- Why is sexual purity so important?
- Forgiveness changed the heart of the man who attacked Maria. Has there been a situation where forgiveness has changed your heart towards someone?
- Who is one person that you have a difficult time forgiving? Why?

Novena to St. Maria Goretti

Oh Saint Maria Goretti who, strengthened by God's grace, did not hesitate even at the age of 11 to shed your blood and sacrifice life itself to defend your virginal purity, look graciously on the unhappy human race, which has strayed far from the path of eternal salvation. Teach us all, and especially youth, with what courage we should flee for the love of Jesus anything that could offend Him or stain our souls with sin. Obtain for us from our Lord victory in temptation, comfort in the sorrows of life, and the grace which we earnestly beg of you. May we one day enjoy with thee the imperishable glory of Heaven. Amen.

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ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS "The Scholar"

Biography (taken from catholic.org)

St. Thomas Aquinas was born toward the end of the year 1226. He was the son of Landulph, Count of Aquino. When St. Thomas was five years old he was placed under the care of the Benedictines of Monte Casino.

When he became of age to choose his state of life, St. Thomas renounced the things of this world and resolved to enter the Order of St. Dominic in spite of the opposition of his family. In 1243, at the age of seventeen, he joined the Dominicans of Naples. Some members of his family resorted to all manner of means over a two-year period to break his constancy. They even went so far as to send an impure woman to tempt him. But all their efforts were in vain and St. Thomas persevered in his vocation.

After making his profession at Naples, he studied at Cologne under the celebrated St. Albert the Great. Here he was nicknamed the "dumb ox" because of his silent ways and huge size, but he was really a brilliant student. At the age of 22, he was appointed to teach. At the same time, he also began to publish his first works. After four years he was sent to Paris. The saint was then a priest. At the age of thirty-one, he received his doctorate.

In 1261, Urban IV called him to Rome where he was appointed to teach, but he positively declined to accept any ecclesiastical dignity. St. Thomas not only wrote but he preached often and with greatest fruit. He left the great monument of his learning, the "Summa Theologica," unfinished. On his way to the second Council of Lyons, he fell sick and died in 1274.

St. Thomas was one of the greatest and most influential theologians of all time. His feast day is January 28th.

Discussion Questions

- Why is learning about the faith important? How is learning about the faith different than learning other subjects, like math?
- What is the one area of faith that you want to know more about?
- St. Thomas was faithful to God even when his choices did not make sense to his family. What role does faith play in your family?

Novena to St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas Aquinas, patron of students, I thank God for the gifts of light and knowledge he bestowed on you, which you used to build up the Church in love. I thank God, too, for the wealth and richness of theological teaching you left in your writings. Not only were you a great teacher, you lived a life of virtue and you made holiness the desire of your heart. If I cannot imitate you in the brilliance of your academic pursuits, I can follow you in the humility and charity that marked your life. As St. Paul said, charity is the greatest gift, and it is open to all. Pray for me that I might grow in holiness and charity. In particular, please obtain the favor I ask during this novena (mention your request). Amen.

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ST. JOAN OF ARC

ST. JOAN OF ARC "The Tomboy"

Biography (taken from catholic.org)

St. Joan of Arc is the patroness of soldiers and of France. On January 6, 1412, Joan of Arc was born to pious parents of the French peasant class. At a very early age, she heard voices: those of St. Michael, St. Catherine and St. Margaret.

At first the messages were personal and general. Then at last came the crowning order. In May 1428, her voices "of St. Michael, St. Catherine, and St. Margaret" told Joan to go to the King of France and help him re-conquer his kingdom. At that time the English king was after the throne of France and the Duke of Burgundy, the chief rival of the French king, was siding with him.

After overcoming opposition from churchmen and courtiers, the 17-year-old girl was given a small army with which she raised the siege of Orleans on May 8, 1429. She then enjoyed a series of spectacular military successes, during which the king was able to enter Rheims and be crowned with Joan at his side.

In May 1430, as she was attempting to relieve Compiègne, she was captured by the Burgundians and sold to the English while Charles and the French did nothing to save her. After months of imprisonment, she was tried at Rouen by a tribunal.

Through her unfamiliarity with the technicalities of theology, Joan was trapped into making a few damaging statements. When she refused to retract the assertion that it was the saints of God who had commanded her to do what she had done, she was condemned to death as a heretic, sorceress and adulteress, and burned at the stake on May 30, 1431. She was 19 years old. Some 30 years later, she was exonerated of all guilt and was ultimately canonized in 1920, making official what the people had known for centuries. Her feast day is May 30.

Discussion Questions

- Why does God seem to choose the most unlikely people to do His work?
- What do you do when others don't believe in you or don't support your decisions?
- Are you willing to go against popular norms/opinions to follow God? Why or why not?
- Do you believe that God has a specific mission for you? How can you know what it is?

Novena to St. Joan of Arc

Eternal Father, you gave us Saint Joan of Arc through your infinite love and mercy for us. We humbly ask that you send down your Holy Spirit upon us, as Your Spirit is the intermediary by which the Word goes forth from your lips and reaches the ears of the faithful. Allow me to be a witness to your Son Jesus Christ just as St. Joan of Arc was. Oh, Jesus, grant me the courage to do your will that I may be in one accord with our Father in Heaven. I thank you for the gift of your love, which I hope to one day fully understand.