

St. Joseph's Family Activities

April Saints and Celebrations



<https://www.theannunciation.org.uk/resources/>

The saints in heaven rejoice with one voice!

Holy Holy Holy....

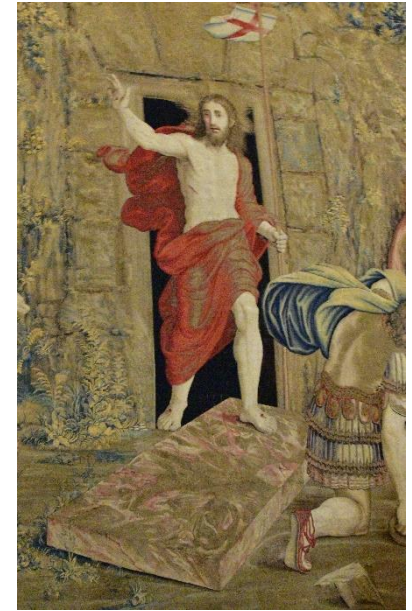
As with March, April is often in Lent and/or the Easter Octave. Saints' days that fall either in Holy Week or the Easter Octave (from Easter Sunday to the second Sunday of Easter) are often moved until after Easter. For consistency, I have kept the original date here but if you are going to Mass to celebrate these feast days, do check with your diocesan ordo. For example, on 8th April we will be celebrating the Solemnity of the Annunciation this year. Details are in the March saints.

As ever, ideas of saints to include or photos of anything that you have done that is inspired by these suggestions are always welcome.

Finally, at this time of year many people are selecting saints as Confirmation names so I have added a short bibliography at the end with some useful web links.

These activities still reflect the four dimensions of our faith, as in everything we do, we are either learning or proclaiming the faith, celebrating it in the liturgy and the sacraments, living it in the context of the family and community and praying it.

The Resurrection: (Vatican Museums) © Carol Ann Harnett 2022. Jesus' Resurrection can be so familiar with it but it is THE fact that drove the early Church as it was so unexpected. It is THE fact which needs to excite us too and it was this knowledge of the Resurrection which fueled the faith of so many of the saints. May all the saints of April, pray for us.



There are three dimensions to the Church: those of us here on earth, journeying to the Father in Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit; those in purgatory whose lives on earth have finished and who are being purified, and those in heaven, sharing in the divine life, for which we have all been created. For them, their joy is complete but because of that, they are eager for us to join them. Close to Our Lord, they intercede (pray) for us. The saints in heaven are more than the canonised saints the Church knows of, as the author of the Book of Revelation says, "I looked and saw a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, tribe and peoples and tongues..." (Rev.7:9).

The saints are our heroes. They come from all walks of life, from all around the world and all ages. We can always find a saint who inspires us and ask him or her to pray for us. So, celebrate your own saints' days, go to Mass if you can as there, the whole Church is united! We can't see the saints, but we join in with their praise in the Holy Holy Holy. Have something special to eat, light your baptism candle or another one if you don't have it, and regard the saints as special members of the family.

2nd April St John Payne (c.1550-1582)

John Payne (or Paine) was from Peterborough, and was originally baptised into the Church of England. As a young man, he decided to become a Catholic and realised that God was calling him to become a priest. There was nowhere to train as it was illegal to be a Catholic priest in England, so he went to the English College at Douai in 1574 and was ordained only two years later. Returning to England, he settled in Essex at the home of the Petre family in Ingatestone Hall. Publicly, he was their estate manager, but secretly, he was a Catholic priest. Some people were suspicious and in 1577 he was put in prison for a while. He left England to go back to Douai to help train new priests, but then returned to Essex until when in 1581 he was arrested again. This time he was charged with treason and conspiracy against the Queen (Elizabeth I), and taken to the Tower of London, where he was cruelly tortured. He was told that as a Catholic he was disloyal to the Queen but he denied this, saying again and again, "that he always, in mind or word, honoured the queen's majesty above any woman in the world; that he would gladly always have spent his life for her pleasure in any lawful service; that he prayed for her as for his own soul; that he never invented or compassed any treason against her majesty, or any of the nobility of England." However despite his pleas of loving the queen, he was hanged at Chelmsford on 2 April 1582.

Today, Catholics are allowed to worship in our own churches. It's not against the law to be a Catholic and go to Mass and it's not illegal for men to be priests. Why don't you say a prayer for King Charles as he undergoes his cancer treatment.



4th April: St Isidore of Sevilla (560 - 636)

St. Isidore was brought up by his older brother, Leander, after the death of their parents. Leander became the archbishop of Sevilla at a time when many people believed that Jesus was not fully God and fully man but that he was a created creature, neither God nor man (Arianism). The Church however, teaches that Jesus is fully God and fully man and when we see the tiny baby in the manger or the broken man on the Cross, we see God in His human nature. When Leander died, Isidore was made archbishop in his brother's place and as archbishop he encouraged ordinary people to study their faith, as well as men learning to be priests. He recognised the value of knowledge of history and of other cultures and decided to write an encyclopaedia of "Universal knowledge." He realised that God created us with memories and the ability to gather, learn, and remember information which both helps us to grow in wisdom, but also to understand people of different cultures.

We find it easy to gather knowledge in our modern world because we can look things up on the internet easily. But when Isidore was alive all books were handwritten and for only the richest people. Most people memorised (learned by heart) all the things they learned.

Why don't you decide to find out a new fact each day for a week and try to memorise it! Or maybe make a large book with your family or class or parish with each person adding a handwritten fact, as a collection.

Let me know how you get on.

11th April St Stanislaus (1036 - 1079)

He was born in Szczepanów in Poland on 26th July 1036. His parents were noblemen who for many years had no children. They prayed for a baby as Hannah did in the book of Samuel in the Old Testament, and when he was born, like Hannah, they dedicated their son to God. From babyhood, Stanislaus' parents taught him to pray as a life of faith was central to their household.

Of course, with a life centred on faith in Christ it was natural that the young Stanislaus realised that God was calling him to be a priest. His parents were overjoyed! After ordination he first worked as a priest in Krakow's beautiful Cathedral eventually becoming bishop of Krakow in 1072.

He had been a popular priest and even more so now as bishop. He had a gift of clarity in his teaching the Gospel. Like Christ Himself, he loved and respect all people, whether they were rich or poor. He was noted for his spiritual wisdom and people flocked to him for advice.

The king of Poland at that time was a mean and selfish man called Boleslaus II. He was greedy and unlike his bishop, had no respect for the people of his country. Bishop Stanislaus told the King that that was no way for a king to behave. At first King Boleslaus paid attention to his bishop, but it soon wore off and when he stole another person's wife and kept her prisoner in his palace, Bishop Stanislaus went to the king and ordered him to let the lady go. He refused, and so Stanislaus excommunicated Boleslaus (he was not allowed to go to Mass or receive Holy Communion). In return the king did an even more evil thing, he killed the bishop whilst he was celebrating Holy Mass in 1079.

Prayer was at the heart of St. Stanislaus' family life when he was growing up. How can prayer be at the heart of the family today? Why don't you pray the Our Father together slowly and reflectively?

12th April St Zeno of Verona (d. 371)

St. Zeno was born in North Africa, but became bishop of Verona (Northern Italy) in 362. He was known for:

- His teaching of who Jesus Christ is (that he is true God and true man) and for giving people the confidence to become missionaries
- His study of and care for the way Mass was celebrated,
- The way he cared for everyone and especially for the poor
- His deep spirituality and life of prayer.

In fact he is a perfect example of someone who lived out all Four Dimensions of the Faith, with Jesus Christ at the centre of his life.

Think of how you can live the Four Dimensions of the Faith this week:

Learning and talking about the faith:

Tell someone that when Jesus was born, He was God when He was born. Jesus is the second person of the Holy Trinity. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Celebrating the liturgy and the sacraments:

Read one of today's readings: see www.universalic.com



Living our faith in Christ:

St. Zeno cared for people who were ill and poor. How can you show care for someone in your family this week?

Christian prayer

Light a candle and spend a few moments in prayer, or may be decide to go to Adoration for a few moments this week.

14th April Blessed Lucien Botovasoa (1908-1947)



Blessed Lucien Botovasoa is a modern "blessed" shows us that in many parts of the world Christians are still being killed for their faith. He was born in 1908 in Vohipeno, a small village in South East Madagascar into a poor farming family. When he was 13 years old, he and many of his fellow villagers learned about Jesus and were baptised on Holy Saturday 1922. His parents did not at first become Christians but seeing how Lucien's life changed and the joy he found in loving Jesus, they too became Christians.

Lucien became a teacher and taught in the parish school and was well-known for his patience and clarity in his teaching. He particularly loved to teach the faith, giving up a lot of his free time to help children in the parish and prepare them for the sacraments. He was particularly fond of all the different saints and used to read their stories to children in the evenings.

In 1930 he married Suzanne Soazanna and they had eight children although only five survived. He was a wonderful father, teaching his children to pray. In addition to his family and teaching responsibilities, Lucien visited the sick and played the harmonium and conducted his church choir at Mass every day, including at 6.00am on weekdays! Lucien prayed constantly; when he was walking, when he prepared his catechetical sessions, on the way to church and on the way home again. A nun once commented that he should have become a priest and he said no, that was not what God wanted. God wanted him to be a married layman and a teacher because that was how he would reach people in the community and tell them about Jesus.

In 1947, there was political trouble and local groups fought each other, killing a lot of people in Holy Week. They burned down churches and schools because they hated the Catholics. Many people escaped into the forest for their own safety and spent Easter week hiding from the authorities. On the Saturday after Easter Lucien and some other men came out of the forest. Lucien gathered together people of all faiths; Protestants, Catholics and Muslims and they all prayed together with great joy! The ruling people did not like this, and to stop him, Lucien was invited to become secretary of one of the political parties, but it was a trap. Lucien knew that if he accepted their invitation, he would not be allowed to be a Christian and so he refused.

So, the local king sent men to arrest Lucien. His wife urged him to hide but he would not, as he knew that it would be better for everyone if he gave himself up. He took a picture of St. Francis off his wall and said, "he will guide me". When he asked the men why he had been arrested they said to him, "because you are a Catholic!"

As Lucien was led away, he was accompanied by about thirty of his former students. They were chanting and singing praise of God because they knew that Lucien was a saint. Before the death sentence was carried out, he turned and said to those with him, "Tell my family not to cry, because I am happy, I am going to my God for ever!"

Then just before the death sentence was carried out, Lucien prayed. He prayed for those who were murdering him, for the pagan king and of course for all his friends and family. He said to the king "You kill and burn the churches; you forbid us from praying and stamp on our crucifixes and rosaries, but you cannot take away our faith in Jesus." Then he prayed, "Save your people O Lord, forgive my brothers, these men here who are going to kill me." Lucien crossed his hands around his rosary and then the executioners killed him and threw his body into the river. He was beatified in 2018. Blessed Lucien, pray for us.

Blessed Lucien's faith was strengthened by knowing about the saints and he was particularly fond of St. Francis of Assisi and followed his rule as a lay person. Why don't you look for a picture of your favourite saint and put it up at home or may be in the classroom? Ask that saint for help, especially when life is difficult. The saints are with Jesus and so they are easily able to ask Jesus for what you need!

16th April, St Bernadette Soubirous (1844 - 1879)



Many people named after Bernadette celebrate their feast day on 11th February which is actually the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and the date of Bernadette's first vision.

St. Marie Bernarde, better known as St. Bernadette, was born in what was then, the tiny unknown village of Lourdes, in France, in 1844 to a family that was so poor that they often had no food to eat. She was uneducated and could barely read and because of this, had not made her First Holy Communion when she first saw Our Lady. She suffered from asthma and other illnesses all her life.

One cold February day, in 1858, when Bernadette was 14 years old, she, her sister, and a friend went to the River Gave to look for firewood. Suddenly Bernadette saw a Lady standing by the grotto of Massabielle. The Lady spoke and told Bernadette to have a chapel built where pilgrims could come and wash. Bernadette looked around and indicated the river, but the Lady said, "No, dig" and Bernadette did. As she dug, a stream gushed out of the ground where there had been no stream before.

The news quickly spread and every time Bernadette went to the grotto, more and more people accompanied her. By 4th March, 200,000 people turned up! On 25th March, the feast of the Annunciation, the vision proclaimed, "I am the Immaculate Conception," in the local dialect. This dogma of the Church had only just been proclaimed and there was no way that the young uneducated Bernadette could have known this, and if she had heard of it, she would have heard it in Latin, which she would not have understood.

Bernadette was always a shy person who hated the limelight and although the attention from the media did help her family out of extreme poverty, she always hated the attention given to her. Finally, she escaped to a convent in Nevers where she worked in the infirmary looking after other sick nuns. However, her health was never good, and her asthma became worse and worse. She died in 1879, going to the Lord in heaven, to live in peace, away from the constant hassle of celebrity. She was canonised in 1933.

Pray a novena to St. Bernadette

A novena is nine days of prayer, often leading up to a saint's feast day (so this one would begin on 7th April) but it can be prayed at any time. Novenas are very good when we have a particular intention that the saint is linked to, so we may pray to St. Bernadette for healing for ourselves or someone else, for example. In this novena, the same prayer is prayed each day.

Dear Saint Bernadette, you were chosen by Almighty God as a channel of His graces and blessings, and through your humble obedience to the requests of Our Blessed Mother Mary, you gained for us the miraculous waters of Spiritual and physical healing.

We now implore you to listen to our pleading prayers that we may be healed of our Spiritual and physical imperfections.

St Bernadette, place our petition in the hands of our Holy Mother Mary, so that she may place them at the feet of her beloved Son, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and He may look on us with mercy and compassion: (Share your request...)

Help us, O Dear Saint Bernadette to follow your example, so that irrespective of our own pain and suffering we may always be mindful of the needs of others, especially those whose sufferings are greater than ours.

Pray Saint Bernadette, that like you, we may always be obedient to the will of our Heavenly Father, and that through our prayers and humility we may bring consolation to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary who have been so grievously wounded by our sins.

Holy Saint Bernadette of Lourdes, pray for us. Amen.

Say: One Decade of the Rosary (or with smaller children 3 x Hail Mary)

... Mary conceived without sin - Pray for us who have recourse to Thee. (x3) (<https://www.daily-prayers.org/novenas/st-bernadette-soubirous/>)

17th April, St Stephen Harding (1050 - 1134)

I can't seem to find a definite date for this interesting English saint. Some sources give today, 17th April and others, the date of his death, 28th March and others, 26th January shared with St. Alberic. He is the co-founder of the Cistercian order, along with St. Alberic.

Stephen was educated in Sherbourne by Benedictine monks, (who later built the stone monastery that now lies in dramatic ruins). After leaving school, he travelled to Scotland and then with a friend to Paris, then to Rome, to see something of the world. (Foreign travel for the sake of it, is not new!) Coming home, they discovered a collection of huts in a place called Molesme, (about halfway between Geneva and Paris). Stephen and his companion found men living a hard life, splitting their time between growing food, prayer and fasting. Stephen was attracted to the community, so his friend continued back to England alone. Stephen immediately got on well with Robert, the Abbot and Alberic, the prior. However, others in the community were tiring of the hard life and so Alberic, Robert and Stephen asked the bishop of Lyons if they could form a new, stricter Benedictine community. This was granted and so they were given land at Citeaux in the heart of a forest. Odo, the Duke of Burgundy (whose terrain they were in) was delighted and sent men to help them build a fine monastery.

The new abbey was consecrated on 21st March 1098, with Robert as Abbot, Alberic as Prior and Stephen as sub-prior, but the following year, Robert went back to the community at Molesme who needed a good leader. Alberic was elected Abbot and Stephen, Prior. When Alberic died, Stephen was elected Abbot and he was even stricter, wanting to use nothing costly in the worship of God. The result of this was that visitors stopped coming and men stopped wanting to join the community. Then many of his fellow brothers became ill and died, and Stephen wondered what was going on. Was it God's will after all? He prayed and asked God to give him a clear sign.

Suddenly there appeared at the monastery gates a band of 30 men from rich families who astonished the porter by saying that they wanted to join the community! Their leader was a young man called Bernard, who had persuaded many of his relatives to come along with him. The numbers in the monastery grew and soon they needed to found a new (daughter) house ... and then another one. (St.) Bernard (see 20th August) was appointed Abbot of Clairvaux one of these daughter houses. One of St. Stephen Harding's greatest achievements is setting out clearly the rule of this new order, Cistercians as they were called. It was a stricter version of the Benedictine rule, but one of the main differences is that Benedictines often settled in towns and served as schools and hospitals so interacted with the local community. Cistercians tended to seek out remote places. Think of the beautiful Cistercian ruins we have in this country, Fountains, Rievaulx and Tintern Abbeys, for example, are still in remote places. There, without the distraction of urban life, men (and later women) could focus on being close to God and living as simply as they could.

How about finding somewhere on your own, away from people, to read a Bible story or to pray. Maybe in a room where no one else is, or in the garden if you have one. Or go as a family to a park or some other open space to pray together. Look at God's beautiful creation and give Him thanks for all the beauty you see.

21st April St Anselm (1033 - 1109)

St. Anselm was born in Italy and became a monk at Bec in Normandy. If you look at his dates you can see that he was alive during the time that the Normans came to England (1066). At Bec, Anselm became Abbot and taught theology and was known for his deeply prayerful life. Because the monastery at Bec had founded some communities in England after the Norman conquest, Anselm came to visit these places and became well known for his wisdom and prayerful life in this country too. When William the conqueror was dying, he asked Anselm to be at his bedside, praying for him.

In 1093 St. Anselm reluctantly agreed (some say he was forced) to become Archbishop of Canterbury. He then had a lot of arguments with the kings who came after William the conqueror, who tried to control the Church, especially the choice and ordination of bishops. Anselm was sent away (exiled) but remained firm that Church organisation and the appointment of bishops and priests should be the work of the Church, not of kings. Eventually these issues were resolved, and he was able return to his writing, and he died peacefully at Canterbury on 21 April 1109. His most famous teaching is:

Faith seeks understanding

This means that we need to have faith before we can begin to understand it. This is why most of us were baptised as babies. In Baptism we are given the gift of faith and then in our lives we grow in understanding of the faith we have been given.

A Prayer by St. Anselm

O my God, teach my heart where and how to seek You, where and how to find You.

You are my God and You are my all, yet I have never seen You.

You have made me and help me when I sin.

You have given me all the good things I have, yet still I do not know You.

I have not yet done that for which I was made.

Teach me to seek You, to look for you.

I cannot look for You unless You teach me or find You unless You show Yourself to me.

Let me look for You in the things I want, let me want to look for you.

Let me find You by loving You, let me love You when I find You.

Amen

Read this prayer by St. Anselm out slowly and then choose one line to repeat slowly whilst thinking about what the words actually mean.



23rd April, St. George, Patron Saint of England

Not a lot of detail is known about St. George's life. First, he was not English! It is often thought that he might have been a Roman soldier who became a Christian and then was prepared to die for His faith rather than give it up.

In the late 2nd and early 3rd Century, the Roman Emperor Diocletian persecuted Christians as they refused to worship the Roman gods. Thousands of men, women and even children were prepared to die rather than give up Jesus, and St. George was one of them.

He was martyred at Lydda (now in Israel) in about 303. He must have been a very special person as very quickly people prayed to him for protection. The story of him killing the dragon to save a princess developed about 500 years later! Dragons in the Bible represent the devil, and so St. George became known as a saint who would fight for those who called on him. This is why St. George is a very popular patron saint.

During the crusades, which began in about 1094 and went on for about 400 years, various European kings and nobles, encouraged by the popes, tried to reclaim the Holy Land (Israel), from Islamic rule. At this time, St. George represented the ideal of a brave Christian soldier and was adopted by a number of cities and countries as their patron. King Richard I of England placed his crusading army under the protection of St. George, and in 1222 his feast was proclaimed a national holiday. Gradually St. George became the patron saint of all soldiers, and then in 1350 King Edward III made him the patron saint of England.

St. George is patron saint of:

Georgia, Lithuania, Palestine, Portugal, Germany, Greece, Russia, Istanbul, Ethiopia, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro, as well as a lot of cities, e.g. Barcelona, Aragon, Catalonia, Genoa, and Venice (after St. Mark). He is also patron saint of Scouts. I suspect that there are a lot more - if you know, please let me know!



St. Edmund king of East Anglia, who was patron saint of England before St. George.

Interesting fact:

Before St. George was patron saint of England, we actually had an English patron saint, St. Edmund, who is portrayed on the reredos of St. Joseph's in Malvern. He was the Anglo-Saxon king of East Anglia but he refused to give up his faith in Jesus when the Vikings attacked. Therefore, he was tied to a tree and was used as target practice by the Vikings in about 870. That is why he is pictured holding an arrow. He was also a martyr and his feast is 20th November. Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk is named after him.

Ideas to Celebrate the Solemnity of St. George

Think of six great things you can do to show your care and concern for other people, spelling out "George". Some ideas have been given, but what can you think of?

G (be generous, give someone something)

E (encourage someone, entertain someone)

O (obey your parents straight away)

R (remove all the rubbish from your room)

G (gather up all the dirty plates at the end of the meal)

E (empty the dishwasher)

Pray this prayer (the collect, or opening prayer from Mass today)

God of hosts, who so kindled the fire of charity in the heart of Saint George your martyr, that he bore witness to the risen Lord both by his life and by his death; grant us through his intercession, we pray, the same faith and power of love, that we who rejoice in his triumph may be led to share with him in the fullness of the Resurrection.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

A Quick Quiz - answers are all in the information above

1. Was St. George English? (No).
2. What was he most likely to have been? (A Roman soldier).
3. Where did he die? (Lydda).
4. What is a martyr? (Someone who dies for their faith).
5. What was St. George patron saint of first? (Crusading soldiers)
6. Why is St. George a popular saint? (Because he seemed to be good at fighting evil).
7. When was St. George's day first celebrated in England as a public holiday? (1222)
8. When was he officially made patron saint of England? (1350).
9. Name three other countries that he is patron saint of? (See the list above).
10. Who was patron saint of England before St. George? (St. Edmund the Martyr).
11. What town in England is named after St. Edmund? (Bury St. Edmunds).
12. Can you think of some famous people called "George"? Remember that the name is written differently in different countries, for example in Spanish it is *Jorge*, in Italian it is *Giorgio*, in German it is *Jurgen* or *Georg*, in France, it is *Georges*, in Poland it is *Jerzy*, in Greece it is *Georgios*. The name "George" actually comes from the Greek *georgos*, meaning "farmer".

25th April, St Mark the Evangelist

Mark and his cousin Barnabas went with St. Paul on his first missionary journey. Then he became a disciple of St. Peter and was in Rome with both St. Peter and St. Paul. The Gospel of St. Mark is written from St. Peter's point of view. Tradition says that St. Mark went to Alexandria in Egypt where he founded the Church there, and it was there that he died. In 828 his bones were stolen and taken to Venice which adopted him as his patron saint (as well as St. George - see above).

St. Mark's Gospel is the shortest Gospel and may have been the first one written, even though it is second in our list of 4 Gospels. Each year the Church focusses on one of the Gospels in the Sunday readings, St. Mark is this year.

The main theme of Mark's Gospel is discovering who Jesus is. He begins by saying "The beginning of the Gospel (Good News) of Jesus Christ the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1). The rest of the Gospel is then proving to us the truth of this very first statement, but Mark leaves the conclusion until Jesus' death. When Jesus dies on the Cross, it's in St. Mark's Gospel that we hear the centurion exclaiming about Jesus, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:39).

However, halfway through the Gospel, Mark gives us a very strong hint when Jesus asks the Apostles who He is (Mk. 8:29). St. Peter answers that Jesus is "the Christ." "Christ" means the anointed one, and the second half of Mark's Gospel shows us what kind of anointing Jesus will have, in His Passion, death, Resurrection and Ascension into heaven.

Who do you say that Jesus is?

St. Mark's Gospel invites us to respond to the question which Jesus put to St. Peter and the Apostles.

In the middle of the Gospel, Jesus asks the Apostles who He is, and St. Peter answers, "You are the Christ" (Mk. 8:29)

Imagine Jesus is saying this to you,

"Who am I?"

Write your answer here in the star.



Each of the Four evangelists have an animal as a symbol.

St. Mark's is a lion.

Can you draw a lion here?

28th April St Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort (1673-1716)

St. Louis was born to a poor family in 1673, at Montfort-La-Cane in Brittany. He loved to spend his time praying as a child and called in at the church on his way to and from school each day. During the school holidays, when he was a teenager, he and other boys used to help the poor in the hospitals and read to them. When he was 19, he decided to become a priest and walked to Paris (over 500 km away) to the seminary. Louis was passionate about helping the poor and always made sure that any money he had, was given to those who needed it more than he did.

He was ordained at the age of 27 and at first was a chaplain in the hospital, but gradually he found that his ability to preach (to tell people about Jesus) was a real gift of the Holy Spirit. He travelled about from town to town with a simple message, that Jesus loves each one of us and wants to repent (say sorry) so that our sins may be forgiven. His words touched so many people that many cried when they heard him speak.

St. Louis is now famous for his deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and wrote a book, *The Secret of the Rosary*, which is the first work to describe the method by which the Rosary is prayed today.

St. Louis was convinced that when we love Mary and turn to her in prayer, especially the rosary, we draw closer to Jesus as she always leads us to her Son, Jesus Christ.

How about praying the rosary today, or "popping" into the church if it is open whenever you go past?

Mary is the
safest, easiest,
shortest and most
perfect way of
approaching Jesus

29th April, St Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

St. Catherine was born in Siena in Italy and as a young child, she had visions of Jesus. He told her to, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). She decided to enter the Third Order of the Dominicans when she was 16 years old. This means that she followed the Dominican rule, but did not live in a community, but at home with her family.

The proper name for "Dominicans" is "Order of Preachers" as their mission is to "preach" or teach about salvation in Jesus Christ. At first, she converted a little room into a kind of "cell" where she stayed and spent the day praying, and had a lot of deep spiritual experiences, including some when she was spiritually "married" to Jesus at a wedding party where He was present with Mary and some other saints. After this Jesus told her in a vision that she was to leave her room and join her family and helped to look after the poor and the sick in Siena.

At that time Italy was not one country as it is today but each city was a separate "country" led by rich families who fought each other. Added to this, the pope did not live in Rome but in Avignon, France. Catherine sent lots of letters to important people urging them to make peace between the different cities, and to stop fighting. She also wrote to Pope Gregory XI, telling him that he needed to get back to Rome, (she even went to Avignon to tell him that in person) and urged him to support his bishops so that they focussed on the sacraments and Mass and not on politics!

St. Catherine lived at a time where hatred of those from different cities led to a lot of hatred and distrust. However, she shows us that the most important thing is to keep Jesus at the centre of our lives.

Celebrating St. Catherine:

St. Catherine was never taught to read or write! At first she dictated her visions and letters to her spiritual director who wrote down what she said. One day, when she was at the age of 30, she decided to pray for the ability to read and write. All of a sudden, she had a vision of Jesus Christ with St. John and St. Thomas Aquinas, and suddenly the letters and words on the page made sense to her.

If you can read and write, maybe you can offer to read to someone else who struggles with reading? Or help someone who needs to write something but who struggles to write. Some older people find writing difficult!



Some words from St. Catherine. How they help us draw closer to Jesus and become "perfect" as he wants us to be?

The soul who lives virtuously, places the root of her tree in the valley of true humility.

As long as you are pilgrims in this life, you are capable of growth, and he who does not go forward, by that very fact, is turning back

When we look at the Sacred Host in Holy Communion, we see in that white round Host God and man. Jesus' divine nature united with His human nature. We see the Body and the Blood of Christ and His Soul which both human and divine at the same time.

Never be judgmental, but see everyone with holy compassion

Select bibliography for these pages:

Holy Bible, Ignatius Bible edition (2014)

Butler's Lives of the Saints, New Concise Edition (1991) Burnes and Oates

[https://www.azquotes.com/author/25852-Louis de Montfort](https://www.azquotes.com/author/25852-Louis_de_Montfort)

Catholic Encyclopaedia

<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>

<https://catholicexchange.com/the-ecstatic-visions-of-st-catherine-of-siena/>

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-stephen-harding-439>

<https://ciofs.info/2019/09/30/un-francescano-secolare-e-beatificato-il-maestro-di-scuola-lucien-botovasoa-del-madagascar/>

<https://www.daily-prayers.org/novenas/st-bernadette-soubirous/>

<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/dialogue-1450>

www.universalis.com

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C%C3%A9teaux_Abbey