

A FRESH LOOK AT THE SAINTS



By

Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ

2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Saint Joseph

SILENT PRESENCE

Saint Anthony of Padua (1195-1231)

GOD'S POWERFUL TONGUE

Saint Philip Neri (1515-1595)

FROM ROME WITH LOVE

Francis de Sales (1567-1622)

THE POWER OF KINDNESS

Saint Pio of Pietrelcina(1887-1968)

PADRE PIO SANTO

St.Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein 1891-1942)

HEALING OF MEMORIES

Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity(1880-1906)

GOD'S DWELLING PLACE

Saint John Mary Vianney (1786-1859)

**THE UNWILLING DESERTER'S
UNRELENTING WAR**

Saint Joseph

SILENT PRESENCE

Saint Joseph's discrete presence in the New Testament infancy narratives has prompted some to call him "The Forgotten Man of Christmas", yet, through the centuries, his figure has grown in the devotion of the Catholic people to the point that his protective presence is perceived in the family, the workplace, on behalf of the universal Church and especially the dying. Daniel Comboni calls him "A Gentleman" and John Paul II defines him as "The Guardian of God's mystery of love". Saint Joseph's silence is meekness, patience, faith and adoration.

On a Saturday, sometimes in June 1997, I was driving from London to Liverpool for a mission appeal. After four hours peaceful progress through the English countryside, I was arriving in the street where the parish was supposed to be, in the outskirts of the city. The time of the anticipated mass was approaching. Driving the whole length of the street, I realized that there was no church in sight. I was puzzled, then I understood that there must be another street of the same name in the inner city. I therefore took the thoroughfare to the center of Liverpool. It was less than half an hour to the mass and I started panicking. "Please, Saint Joseph" I prayed, "Help me to arrive on time!" As I was driving I saw a sign with a word I seemed to recognize, I branched to the right, I stopped to question a pedestrian, I was in the right direction... Eventually, I entered the church with five minutes to spare. "Dear father", the parish priest said rather resentfully, "You do cut it thin, don't you?" Of course, he didn't know that I was there only for a special grace of Saint Joseph!

On the following month, July 20 1997, coming back from a Priestly Ordination in Spain, I was flying from Valencia to Barcelona, where I had my connecting flight to Venice. The plane was late. We had not landed yet and it was already time for the Venice plane to take off. I was already

imagining missing that plane with all the inconvenience that goes with it. “Dear Saint Joseph” I cried, “Don’t let me miss the plane!”. As God wanted we landed, I run to the departure gate of my flight(It was deserted!) only to be addressed by the hostess at the counter: “Are you Mr. Carraro? Yes? Please, get in quickly, we are taking off”. Even that time, thanks to Saint Joseph, I made it! These are only two examples of numberless others...

Behaving thus, I was only continuing the tradition of devotion to Saint Joseph that was proper of Saint Daniel Comboni. It is a spontaneous, affectionate link with this Saint whom we perceive to be so helpful in the practical, day-to-day facts of life. Daniel Comboni considered Saint Joseph an asset for his mission, especially in financial matters. He mentions him not less than 150 times in his writings and likes to address him with the affectionate name of Beppo (vernacular form for Joseph). He wrote: “Saint Joseph is one of the most precious treasures of the Church and of Africa and he is my real administrator and bursar. In dealing with Saint Joseph one is dealing with a gentleman; and Beppo is such a gentleman that he first thinks of the spirit and our souls, and then of the money...So, courage. No obstacle frightens us. A many great napoleons and pounds sterling are hidden in Saint Joseph’s beard; he will give them to us when we need them”. Somehow, Daniel Comboni’s devotion to Saint Joseph is the expression in history of the place that this Saint has gained in the heart of the Christian people.

A rich, eventful life

From the outline provided by the gospel infancy narratives, however scanty, Saint Joseph’s life appears rich and eventful: after an initial moment of stunned disbelief at Mary’s condition, he receives his own Annunciation in a dream; he marries her and gets her to Bethlehem; takes mother and child off to Egypt when they are threatened by the murderous king Herod; then settles them in Nazareth. Yet there are important omissions. Joseph is not explicitly described as present at Jesus’ birth or the reception of the shepherds. The trip to Egypt is not actually recounted. The last reference to Joseph as a living person –a single sentence- occurs when Jesus is twelve, shortly after Christ had made a rather cutting distinction between his parents on earth and his “real “ Father. Joseph’s death goes unrecorded.

Very soon the gaps of the Gospel were filled by the imagination of the Apocrypha, those books, contemporary to the canonical ones of the New testament, that were excluded from the official list because of their historical

unreliability and spiritual errors. The most influential one elaborating Joseph's story was the 2nd century text called *The Protevangelium of James*. They are the ones that made Saint Joseph a ninety years old man, with other children from a previous marriage...On the whole, the Apocrypha were a dead end. Their creativity was a liability. The 4th century church father Saint Jerome called them *deliria* (hallucinations).

“God does whatever Joseph commands”

In the first millennium of Christianity, Joseph was not a popular saint. His name doesn't appear in any list of saints before the year 1000. Beginning in the late 1300s, Joseph enjoyed one of the greatest religious rehabilitations in the history of Christian spirituality. Two dynamic clerics thought it sound enough to propose Joseph the carpenter as the paternal model of the Christian family. The first is Jean Gerson, the chancellor of the University of Paris, who suggested that the age of Joseph at the time of his marriage was 36 because that is the age in which a person reaches the “prime of life”, according to the philosopher Aristotle. That is the age of the great poet Dante Alighieri when, as he wrote in the *Divine Comedy*, he started his fantastic journey to the otherworld.

Saint Bernardino of Siena, a powerhouse preacher like a Billy Graham of his time, was the second champion of the devotion to Saint Joseph and he highlighted the Saint's qualities of administrator and craftsman. They were proposing Joseph as a figure who would help to navigate the crisis of the family and the church: as a protector and a nurturer. “Why not pray Saint Joseph, Bernardino asked, since Christ does not now deny to Joseph that intimacy, reverence and very high honor which he gave him on earth, as a son of his father”.

A great champion of the devotion to Saint Joseph is Teresa of Avila. Born in 1515, she was one of the Catholic Church's greatest mystics and through tireless work of founding and defending a new model for convents and monasteries, a heroine of the Counter-Reformation, Catholicism's vigorous response to the challenge of Protestantism. After prayer to Joseph cured her of an early case of paralysis, she adopted him as her “true father”, stating that “in heaven God does whatever he commands”. Teresa took the Nazareth household as the model of her order and named 12 out of 17 monasteries after Joseph.

The devotion snowballed and the Earthly Trinity of Jesus, Mary and Joseph took Catholic Europe by storm. It also leaped to the New World, where Joseph became the patron Saint of both “New Spain” and “New France”. To this day, he remains the official saint of Catholics in Mexico and Canada. At last his looks changed: the deviant influence of the Apocrypha was overcome. Artists like Murillo started giving him the vigorous features of a young man. The gospels’ accounts, taken at their face value, yielded the aspect of Joseph patron of virgins and of families and the silence about his death was filled by the obvious devotion of thinking that he ended his life assisted by Mary and Jesus and therefore he became the natural protector and patron of the dying.

Eventually he was assumed to protect the Universal Church from heaven as he had the Holy Family on earth. In 1955 Pope Pius XII put in evidence Saint Joseph as a working man, decreeing a second feast day for him on May 1 to compete with communist May Day. In 1962 Pope John XXIII inserted Joseph’s name in the Canon of the Mass, reportedly the first such addition in over 1300 years.

Guardian of God’s mystery of love

In 1989, pope John Paul II wrote an encyclical letter by the title *Redemptoris Custos* (The Guardian of the Redeemer): “On the person and mission of Saint Joseph in the life of Christ and of the Church”. We can consider it the point of arrival of the theological reflection and devotional love of the Christian community for Saint Joseph. The pope stated his desire to “offer some reflections concerning him to whose custody God entrusted his most precious treasures. In this way the whole Christian people not only will turn to Saint Joseph with greater fervor and invoke his patronage with trust, but will always keep, before their eyes, his humble, mature way of serving and taking part in the plan of salvation”.

The pope continued: “I am convinced that by reflecting upon the way that Mary’s spouse shared in the divine mystery, the Church – on the road towards the future with the whole of humanity – will be enabled to discover ever anew her own identity within this redemptive plan, which is founded on the mystery of the Incarnation. This is precisely the mystery in which Joseph of Nazareth shared like no other human being except Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word. He shared in it with her; he was involved in the same

Saint Anthony of Padua (1195-1231)

GOD'S POWERFUL TONGUE

Contended between Lisbon, his place of birth and Padua where he died, he is by far the most famous Franciscan Saint after Saint Francis. Called "the Hammer of the Heretics" and the "Ark of the Covenant" because of his knowledge and powerful eloquence, he died at only 36 years of age, having gained a fame of miracle worker that endures to this day. The relic of his miraculous, uncorrupted tongue, is exposed in the splendid basilica that bear his name in the city of Padua, Italy.

Montepaolo is a small hermitage near the town of Forlì in northern Italy. In the beginning of the XIII century, a young Portuguese friar of poor health, still unknown, by the name of Fray Anthony was seeking to follow the way of Saint Francis of Assisi and live in solitude and penance. One day the small community to which he belonged went down to the city of Forlì to join the joyful occasion of the Priestly Ordination of a good number of Dominican and Franciscan Friars.

When the time for ordination arrived, it was found that no one had been appointed to preach. The superior turned first to the Dominicans, and asked that one of their number should address the assembly; but everyone declined, saying he was not prepared. In their emergency they then chose Anthony, whom they thought only able to read the Missal, and commanded him to speak whatever the Spirit of God might put into his mouth. Anthony, compelled by obedience, spoke at first slowly and timidly, but soon enkindled with fervor, began to explain the most hidden sense of Holy Scripture with such profound erudition and sublime doctrine that all were struck with astonishment. In that moment Anthony's public career began.

He possessed in an eminent degree all the good qualities that characterize an eloquent preacher: a loud and clear voice, a winning countenance, wonderful memory, and profound learning, to which were added from on high the spirit of prophecy and an extraordinary gift of miracles. With the zeal of an

apostle he undertook to reform the morality of his time. The fruits of his sermons were, therefore, as admirable as his eloquence itself. No less fervent was he in fighting against heresy, which infested the centre and north of Italy, and also the south of France.

Among the many miracles St. Anthony wrought in the conversion of heretics, the most noted and recorded by his biographers are the following: The first took place at Rimini, in Italy and it is that of a horse, which was kept fasting for three days and refused the oats placed before him, till he had knelt down and adored the Blessed Sacrament, which St. Anthony was holding in his hands. Another miracle is that of the poisoned food offered him by some Italian heretics, which he rendered harmless by the sign of the cross.

A miracle worthy of mention and bordering with the legendary is that of the famous sermon to the fishes on the bank of the river Brenta in the neighborhood of Padua. Again, invited to preach at the funeral of a usurer, Fray Anthony took for his text the words of the Gospel: "Where your treasure is, there also is your heart." In the course of the sermon he said: "That rich man is dead and buried in hell; but go to his treasures and there you will find his heart." The relatives and friends of the deceased, led by curiosity, followed this injunction, and found the heart, still warm, among the coins.

The zeal with which St. Anthony fought against heresy, and the great and numerous conversions he obtained made him worthy of the title of *Malleus Hereticorum* (Hammer of the Heretics). Though his preaching was always seasoned with the salt of discretion, nevertheless he spoke openly to all, to the rich as to the poor, to the people as well as those in authority. In a synod at Bourges in the presence of many prelates, he even reprovved the Archbishop, Simon de Sully, so severely, that he induced him to sincere amendment.

In 1230, while war raged in Lombardy, St. Anthony, only one year before his untimely death, betook himself to Verona to solicit from the ferocious landlord Ezzelino the liberty of the prisoners. He failed in his attempt; he nevertheless jeopardized his own life for the sake of those oppressed by tyranny, and thereby showed his love and sympathy for the people. Thus the triumph of St. Anthony's missionary career manifests itself not only in his

holiness and his numerous miracles, but also in the popularity and subject matter of his sermons, since he had to fight against the three most obstinate vices of luxury, avarice and tyranny.

The attraction of martyrdom

Fernando Martins de Bulhões was born on August 15, 1195, in Lisbon, Portugal, to Vicente Martins de Bulhões and Teresa Pais Taveira. His was a very rich family of the nobility who wanted him to become educated, and they arranged for him to be instructed at the local cathedral school. Against the wishes of his family, however, he entered the community of Canons Regular at the Abbey of St. Vincent on the outskirts of Lisbon. The Canons were famous for their dedication to scholarly pursuits, and sent the youth to their major center of studies, the Abbey of the Holy Cross in Coimbra. There the young Fernando studied theology and Latin. Gifted with an excellent understanding and a prodigious memory, he soon gathered from the Sacred Scriptures and the writings of the Fathers a treasure of theological knowledge.

After his ordination to the priesthood, Fernando was named guest-master and placed in charge of hospitality for the abbey. It was in this capacity, in 1219, that he came into contact with five Franciscan friars who were on their way to Morocco to preach the Gospel to the Muslims there. Fernando was strongly attracted to the simple, evangelical lifestyle of the friars, whose order had been founded only eleven years before. Soon news arrived that the five Franciscans had been martyred in Morocco, the first to be killed in their new order.

On January 16 1220, he saw, brought into the Church of the Holy Cross, the bodies of the first Franciscan martyrs. Fernando was inflamed with the desire of martyrdom, and resolved to become a Friar Minor, that he might preach the Faith to the Saracens and suffer for Christ's sake. Having confided his intention to some of the brethren of the convent of Olivares near C3oimbra, who used to beg alms at the Abbey of the Canons Regular, he received from their hands the Franciscan habit in the very Convent of the Holy Cross.

Thus Ferdinand left the Canons Regular of St. Augustine to join the Order of Friars Minor, taking at the same time the new name of Anthony, the ancient holy hermit. Shortly after, Anthony set off to Morocco with another friar. He

intended to die preaching the Gospel there. However, upon his arrival in Morocco, he fell so ill he had no choice but to return home. On the return trip to Portugal, his ship was driven by a storm upon the coast of Sicily and he landed at Messina. From Sicily, he made his way to Assisi and sought admission into a convent in Italy, but met with difficulty on account of his sickly appearance. He was finally assigned, out of pure compassion, to the rural hospice of Montepaolo near Forli, outside Bologna, Italy. There he lived as a hermit and was also put to work in the kitchen. It was there that the secret of his higher education and extraordinary gift of preaching were providentially revealed.

Saint Francis and Saint Anthony

In his capacity as a preacher Fray Anthony came to the attention of the founder of the order, Francis of Assisi. Francis held a strong distrust of the place of theological studies in the life of his friars, fearing that it might lead to leave out their commitment to a life of real poverty. In Anthony, however, he found a kindred spirit for his vision, who was also able to provide the teaching needed by young members of the order who might seek ordination.

In 1224, St. Francis instructed Fray Anthony by the following letter to teach theology to the brethren: “To Brother Anthony, my bishop (i.e. teacher of sacred sciences), Brother Francis sends his greetings. It is my pleasure that you teach theology to the brethren, provided, however, that, as the Rule prescribes, the spirit of prayer and devotion may not be extinguished. Farewell”. From then on the young Portuguese’s skills were used to the utmost by the Church.

After the death of St. Francis, 3 October, 1226, Anthony returned to Italy. His way led him through La Provence on which occasion he performed the following miracle: fatigued by the journey, he and his companion entered the house of a poor woman, who placed bread and wine before them. She had forgotten, however, to shut off the tap of the wine-barrel, and to add to this misfortune, the Saint's companion broke his glass. Anthony began to pray, and suddenly the glass was made whole, and the barrel filled anew with wine.

Mission at Padua

Shortly after his return to Italy, Anthony resigned administrative high positions in the Order so as to devote more time to preaching and retired to the Convent of Padua, which he had himself founded. The last Lent he preached was that of 1231; the crowd of people who came from all parts to hear him, frequently numbered 30 thousand and more. His last sermons were principally directed against hatred and enmity, and his efforts were crowned with wonderful success.

Permanent reconciliations were effected, peace and concord re-established, liberty given to debtors and other prisoners, restitutions made, and enormous scandals repaired; in fact, the priests of Padua were no longer sufficient for the number of penitents, and many of these declared they had been warned by celestial visions, and sent to St. Anthony, to be guided by his counsel. Others after his death said that he appeared to them in their dreams, admonishing them to go to confession.

At Padua also took place the famous miracle of the amputated foot. A young man, Leonardo by name, in a fit of anger kicked his own mother. Repentant, he confessed his fault to St. Anthony who said to him: "The foot of him who kicks his mother deserves to be cut off." Leonardo ran home and cut off his foot. Learning of this, St. Anthony took the amputated member of the unfortunate youth and miraculously rejoined it.

Through St. Anthony's mediation, the Municipality of Padua, on March 1231, passed a law in favor of debtors who could not pay their debts. A copy of this law is still preserved in Padua museum. From this, as well as other episodes, the civil and religious importance of the Saint's influence in the thirteenth century is easily understood.

Anthony became ill with edema and, in 1231, went to the woodland retreat at Camposampiero with two other friars for a respite. There Anthony lived in a cell built for him under the branches of a walnut tree. Anthony died on the way back to Padua on June 13 1231 at the Poor Clare monastery at Arcella, aged 36. He had lived fifteen years with his parents, ten years as a Canon Regular of St. Augustine, and eleven years in the Order of Friars Minor. His death was announced to the citizens of Padua by a troop of children, crying: "The holy Father is dead; St. Anthony is dead!"

The uncorrupted tongue

Pope Gregory IX, firmly persuaded of his sanctity by the numerous miracles he had wrought, inscribed him within a year of his death in the calendar of Saints. Proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius XII on January 16, 1946, he is sometimes called the "Evangelical Doctor" (*Doctor Evangelicus*).

The name of Anthony became celebrated throughout the world, and with it the name of Padua. The inhabitants of that city erected to his memory a magnificent basilica, where his precious relics were transferred in 1263, in presence of St. Bonaventure, Minister General at the time.

When the vault in which for thirty years his sacred body had reposed was opened, the flesh was found reduced to dust but the tongue uninjured, fresh, and of a lively red color. St. Bonaventure, beholding this wonder, took the tongue affectionately in his hands and kissed it, exclaiming: "O Blessed Tongue that always praised the Lord, and made others bless Him, now it is evident what great merit thou hast before God." The relic of his miraculous, uncorrupted tongue, recently taken by thieves, was quickly recovered undamaged by secret intervention of the bosses of organized crime.

The fame of St. Anthony's miracles has never diminished, and even at the present day he is acknowledged among the greatest miracle workers of all times. Indeed his very popularity has to a certain extent obscured his personality. Today, Saint Anthony of Padua is venerated as one of the greatest Franciscan saints. He is considered by the Catholic Church to be the patron saint of barren women, lost articles, the poor, and travelers.

The ubiquitous Saint Anthony

One of the most beloved of saints, his images are all over the world. He is the patron saint of his adopted home of Padua, of his native Lisbon as well as many other unlikely places in the world.

Seventeenth-century Spanish missionaries came across a small Native American community along what was then known as the Yanaguana River on the feast day of Saint Anthony. They renamed the river in his honor, and eventually a mission was built nearby as well with the same name. This

one." This was the secret of his popularity in the folklore of the Roman poor. Yet, this most unconventional of the Saints was a great mystic. He is the founder of the Congregation of the Oratory to which Blessed John Henry Newman belonged.

Philip Neri was a young man of 29 when he received his most remarkable mystic gift. Already dedicated to the downtrodden of Rome since 1533, he used to take refuge in the catacombs in order to rest and give vent to his extraordinary urge for prayer. It was in the catacomb of S. Sebastian, a few days before Pentecost 1544, when there appeared to him a globe of fire, which entered into his mouth and lodged in his chest; and from that moment, he was suddenly surprised with such a fire of love, that, unable to bear it, he threw himself on the ground, and, like one trying to cool himself, bared his chest to temper in some measure the flame he felt.

When he had remained so for some time, and had a little recovered, he rose up full of unwonted joy, and immediately all his body began to shake with a violent tremor; and putting his hand to his bosom, he felt by the side of his heart, a swelling about as big as a man's fist, but neither in that moment nor afterwards did he experience the slightest pain or wound. The cause of this swelling was discovered by the doctors who examined his body after his death, fifty years later.

The saint's heart had been dilated under the sudden impulse of love, and in order that it might have sufficient room to move, two ribs had been broken, and curved in the form of an arch. From the time of the miracle till his death, his heart would palpitate violently whenever he performed any spiritual action. The phenomenon is so unusual and striking that it has been compared to Saint Francis of Assisi's stigmata.

His devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, like the miracle of his heart, is one of those manifestations of sanctity which are peculiarly his own. So great was the fervor of his charity, that, instead of recollecting himself before Mass, he had to use deliberate means of distraction in order to attend to the external rite. During the last five years of his life he had permission to celebrate privately in a little chapel close to his room. At the "*Agnus Dei*"

the server used to go out, lock the doors, and hung up a notice: "Silence, the Father is saying Mass". When he returned in two hours or more, the Saint was so absorbed in God that he seemed to be at the point of death.

Unconventional lines

Philip Neri was born at Florence, Italy, on July 22 1515. Philip's family had lived for many generations in Florence, where not a few of its members had practiced the learned professions, and therefore took rank with the Tuscan nobility. Among these was Philip's own father, Francesco Neri, a notary. Besides a younger brother, who died in early childhood, Philip had two younger sisters, Katherine and Elizabeth. It was with them that "the good Pippo", as he soon began to be called, committed his only known fault. He gave a slight push to Katherine, because she kept interrupting him and Elizabeth, while they were reciting psalms together, a practice of which, as a boy, he was remarkably fond.

One incident of his childhood is dear to his early biographers as the first visible intervention of Providence on his behalf, and perhaps dearer still to his modern disciples, because it reveals the human characteristics of a boy amid the supernatural graces of a saint. When about eight years old he was left alone in a courtyard to amuse himself; seeing a donkey loaded with fruits, he jumped on its back; the beast bolted, and both tumbled into a deep cellar. His parents ran to the spot and extricated the child, not dead, as they feared, but entirely uninjured.

From the first it was evident that Philip's career would run on no conventional lines; Having studied the humanities under the best scholars, among whom the Dominicans of the famous Saint Mark's Convent, at the age of sixteen he was sent to help his father's cousin in business at S. Germano, near Monte Cassino. He applied himself with diligence, and his kinsman soon determined to make him his heir. But he would often withdraw for prayer to a little mountain chapel belonging to the Benedictines of Monte Cassino. It was here that his vocation became definite: he was called to be the Apostle of Rome.

In 1533 he arrived in Rome. He had not informed his father of the step he was taking, and he had deliberately cut himself off from his kinsman's patronage. For seventeen years Philip lived as a layman in Rome, serving the poor, probably without thinking of becoming a priest. He however spent

some of his time for three years, beginning about 1535, in the study of philosophy and theology. When he considered that he had learnt enough, he sold his books, and gave the price to the poor. Though he never again made study his regular occupation, whenever he was called upon to cast aside his habitual reticence, he would surprise the most learned with the depth and clearness of his theological knowledge.

Philip Neri and Ignatius of Loyola

He now devoted himself entirely to the sanctification of his own soul and the good of his neighbors. His active apostolate began with solitary and unobtrusive visits to the hospitals. Next he induced others to accompany him. Then he began to frequent the shops, warehouses, banks, and public places of Rome, touching the hearts of those whom he chanced to meet, and exhorting them to serve God. Around 1544 he became the friend of St. Ignatius. Many of his disciples tried and found their vocations in the infant Society of Jesus; but the majority remained in the world, and formed the nucleus of what afterwards became the Brotherhood of the Little Oratory.

In 1551, however, he received an additional true call from God. At the bidding of his confessor — nothing short of this would overcome his humility — he entered the priesthood, and went to live at S. Jerome, where a staff of chaplains was supported by the Confraternity of Charity. Each priest had two rooms assigned to him, in which he lived, slept, and ate, under no rule save that of living in charity with his brethren. The church of S. Jerome was much frequented even before the coming of Philip, and his confessional there soon became the centre of a mighty apostolate.

He stayed in church, hearing confessions or ready to hear them, from daybreak till nearly midday, and not content with this, he usually confessed some forty persons in his room before dawn. Thus he labored untiringly throughout his long priesthood. As a physician of souls he received marvelous gifts from God. He would sometimes tell a penitent his most secret sins without his confessing them; and other similar extraordinary gifts.

Philip devoted his afternoons to men and boys, inviting them to informal meetings in his room, taking them to visit churches, interesting himself in their amusements, hallowing with his sweet influence every department of

their lives. At one time he had a longing desire to follow the example of St. Francis Xavier, and go to India. With this end in mind in 1557 he sought the counsel of a holy monk and was told that Rome was to be his India. Philip at once abandoned the idea of going abroad, and in the following year the informal meetings in his room developed into regular spiritual exercises in an oratory, which he built over the church. At these exercises laymen preached and the excellence of the discourses, the high quality of the music, and the charm of Philip's personality attracted not only the humble and lowly, but men of the highest rank and distinction in Church and State.

The Oratory

The Congregation of the Oratory Philip founded was a community of secular priests, approved by the Pope in 1575. It is of the least conventional nature, rather resembling a residential clerical club than a monastery of the older type. The members live in community, and each pays his own expenses, having the usufruct of his private means—a startling innovation on the monastic vow of poverty. They have indeed a common table, but it is kept up precisely as a regimental mess, by monthly payments from each member.

There are no vows, and every member of the society is at liberty to withdraw when he pleases, and to take his property with him. The government, strikingly unlike the Jesuits', is of a participatory form; and the superior, though first in honor, has to take his turn in discharging all the duties which come to each priest of the society, including that of waiting at table, which is not entrusted in the Oratory to lay brothers, according to the practice in most other communities.

Each house can call its superior to account, can depose, and can restore him, without appeal to any external authority, although the bishop of the diocese in which any house of the Oratory is established is its ordinary and immediate superior, though without power to interfere with the rule. Their churches are non-parochial, and they can perform such rites as baptisms, marriages, etc., only by permission of the parish priest.

Philip Neri encouraged the singing of the *lauda spirituale* (laude) in his oratory services. The prominent composers Tomás Luis de Victoria and Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina participated in this music. The unique and varied aesthetic experience of the Oratory has been brilliantly highlighted by the historians.

The Oratory chiefly spread in Italy and in France, where in 1760 there were 58 houses. An English house, founded in 1847 at Birmingham, is celebrated as the place at which Cardinal Newman fixed his abode, after his submission to the Roman Catholic Church. Later a second place was opened at Brompton, where it is still based today. Its church, the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, was consecrated on 16 April 1884 and is the second largest Roman Catholic church in London.

The lovely Saint

The last years of his life were marked by alternate sickness and recovery. In 1593, he showed the true greatness of one who knows the limits of his own endurance, and resigned the office of superior which had been conferred on him for life. In 1594, when he was in an agony of pain, the Blessed Virgin appeared to him, and cured him. On May 25 1595, the feast of Corpus Christi, he went to say Mass in his little chapel, two hours earlier than usual. During the Mass he began to sing, which was an unusual thing for him, and sang the whole of it with the greatest joy and devotion.

He was in perfect health for the rest of that day, and made his usual night prayer; but when in bed, he predicted the hour of the night in which he would die. At about an hour after midnight he suffered a big hemorrhage and Cardinal Baronius, who had succeeded him in the leadership of the Oratory, made the commendation of his soul, and asked him to give the confreres his final blessing. The Saint raised his hand slightly, and looked up to heaven. Then inclining his head towards them, he breathed his last. He was eighty years of age. Philip Neri was beatified by Paul V in 1615, and canonized by Gregory XV in 1622.

He was the patient reformer, who leaves outward things alone and works from within, relying more on personal influence than on disciplinary organization, and prefers the spontaneous practice of the counsels of perfection to their enforcement by means of vows; above all, he was the Saint of God, who was so irresistibly attractive, as to win the title of the "*Amabile santo* (lovable saint)".

Practical commonplaceness

Practical commonplaceness was the special mark which distinguished his form of ascetic piety. Philip looked like any other man. He appeared as a

Francis de Sales (1567-1622)

THE POWER OF KINDNESS

He was from a noble family and had a law degree but he vowed himself to the service of God and became a priest and a bishop. As a bishop, Francis was known as friend of the poor, a man of almost superhuman affability and understanding. As a spiritual director, he proposed a message of love and moderation that had enormous effect in reestablishing the vitality and credibility of the Catholic Church at the time of the Protestant revolution. Proclaimed a doctor of the Church, in his writings, he expounded a way to holiness for all that anticipates the teachings of Vatican II. He was chosen by pope Pius XI as patron of journalists.

It was in winter 1594 and Fr. Francis de Sales had walked the whole day in the snow, visiting families and announcing to call to conversion to the Catholic Church. The long walk was a heavy tax on the strength of the missionaries and during the winter it exposed them to real dangers. That evening Francis was attacked by wolves and only escaped by spending the night in a tree. When daylight came he was discovered by some peasants in such an exhausted condition that had they not helped him to reach their hut and revived him with food and warmth, he would have died. These good people were Calvinists. With his thanks, Francis spoke words of enlightenment and charity and his rescuers were later restored to the faith. Twice in January 1595, he was ambushed by Protestant fanatics who had sworn to take his life. On both occasions he was saved, seemingly, by a miracle.

The protestant reformation had been in full swing in Savoy, under the influence of the Calvinists from Switzerland. The Chablais, a section of Savoy on the south shore of Lake Geneva, had been invaded by militant Protestants from Berne. Catholic worship was outlawed, and churches were burned or razed when not appropriated for Protestant use. Religious orders were suppressed and priests expelled. The Duke of Savoy had appealed to the bishop of Geneva to send Catholic missionaries into the district.

The bishop summoned his canons and put the situation before them, disguising none of the difficulties. Fr. Francis de Sales stood up to offer himself, saying simply, "My lord bishop, if you think I am capable, tell me to go". Given the depth of local hostility to the Catholic Church, this was considered a nearly suicide mission. Nevertheless, Francis volunteered. To his delight, the bishop accepted at once. The Duque de Boisy, Francis' father, tried to stop him, but nothing could shake Francis' resolution. He departed without his father's blessing. He was 27 years old and only three years in the priesthood.

Although at first the missionaries had little reward for their labors, they did not lose heart. Francis continually sought new ways to reach the minds of the people. He began to write brief leaflets, setting forth the leading dogmas of the Church as opposed to the tenets of Calvinism. These little papers, on which he worked in spare moments, were copied and recopied by hand and widely distributed. Copies of these leaflets in the original written form are still preserved in the convent at Annecy.

It was not a proper newspaper but all the same, the little tracts or leaflets, scattered abroad, proved quite effective, and in time there was a stream of lapsed Catholics asking for reconciliation with their Church. At least twenty-three hundred families were publicly reconciled as a result of Francis' mission. When, after three or four years, Bishop de Granier came to visit the mission, the results of Francis' untiring zeal were plain to see. Catholic faith and worship had been reestablished in the province, and by 1598 the whole district was once more predominantly Catholic.

The lawyer of God's mercy

Francis de Sales was born at Thorens, in the Duchy of Savoy, on August 21, 1567. His father, the Duke François de Sales de Boisy, and his mother, Françoise de Sionnaz, belonged to old aristocratic families. When Francis was born, the eldest of thirteen children, his mother was only fifteen. The boy was frail at birth, but with devoted care he grew to vigorous maturity. Francis was obedient, truthful, and habitually generous to those less fortunate than himself. He was responsive in matters of religion, and loved books and knowledge. In his fourteenth year, Francis went to the University of Paris and joined the College of Clermont which was under Jesuit direction, and renowned for both piety and scholarship. During this time his

heart became more and more fixed on giving himself to God, and he took a vow of perpetual chastity, placing himself under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin.

He was, nevertheless, not free from trials. The love of God had always meant more to him than anything else, and now he became prey to the fear that he had lost God's favor and will be condemned to hell. This obsession haunted him day and night. It was a heroic act of pure love that finally brought him deliverance. "O Lord," he cried, "if I am never to see you in Heaven, this at least grant me, that I may never curse or blaspheme your holy name. If I may not love you in the other world, let me at least every instant of my brief existence here love you as much as I can."

After six years in Paris he was called home by his father, who sent him to the University of Padua to study jurisprudence. He was at Padua for four years, and there, as at Paris, he won a name for scholarship and virtuous conduct. At twenty-four he was given the degree of Doctor of both Civil and Canon Law. A pilgrimage to Loreto and a short stay at Rome followed, then he returned to his father's castle. For some eighteen months, he led, at least outwardly, the life of a conventional young nobleman.

Priest and Bishop

That his son and heir should now settle down and marry was the Duke of Boisy's desire, and this autocratic father had already chosen for him a charming bride. Francis, by his distant though courteous manner to the young lady, soon made it plain that in this matter, as in many others, he could not carry out his father's wishes. Not long afterwards he again annoyed his father by declining the honor offered him by the prince of Savoy of a seat in the senate, an unusual compliment to one so young.

The Catholic bishop of Geneva, Claude de Granier, was living at Annecy, his own diocese now being in Calvinist hands. The bishop, impressed by Francis' character, is reported to have made this prophecy: "This young man will become a pillar of the Church and my successor in this see." The bishop offered Francis a high position in the cathedral and, in view of that position, Francis was ordained a priest, on December 1593, at the age of 26, with his father's permission. Soon he was totally taken up by the campaign we described above.

The bishop had long been considering Francis as a coadjutor and successor, but Francis declined the honor, thinking himself unworthy. In the end he yielded. No sooner was his decision made than he fell dangerously ill with a fever. When he had regained his strength, he started for Rome to seek confirmation by the pope. Pope Clement VIII ratified the choice, but he wished to examine the candidate personally, in presence of the Sacred College. The improvised examination was a triumph for Francis. "Drink, my son", said the Pope to him. "from your cistern, and from your living wellspring; may your waters issue forth, and may they become public fountains where the world may quench its thirst." The prophesy was to be realized.

Bishop Francis was a gentle a strong pastor of his flock for twenty years. Because of his intelligence and deep holiness, as pastor of a poor and tormented diocese, in a mountainous landscape in which he knew well both its harshness and beauty, he wrote to his dear friend, Jane of Chantal: "I found God full of sweetness and gentleness among our highest and roughest mountains, where many simple souls loved and adored him in all truth and sincerity; and deer and chamois ran here and there among the frightening frost to proclaim his praises".

In 1622, the Duke of Savoy, traveling in state to meet the king, invited the good bishop of Geneva to join him. Francis accepted, although the journey promised to be chilly and uncomfortable. On his arrival at Avignon, he avoided the pomp and entertainments of the court, and tried to lead his customary austere life. But he was much sought after since people wanted to see him and to hear him preach.

He was worn out, therefore, when he stopped at Lyons on his return. The convent of the Visitation provided him with a cottage on their grounds, where he stayed for a month. On December 28 1622, he died peacefully, expressing all confidence in God's mercy. He was 56. In his "*Treatise on the Love of God*", Francis had written: "The measure of love is to love without measure," a precept which he had consistently taught and lived. The influence of his life and of his teaching on the Europe of that time and of the following centuries was immense.

Holy friendship

Baroness Jane Frances de Chantal was a young widow whose husband had been killed and had left her with four children. She was touched by the preaching of Bishop Francis when she met him in Dijon, her home town, in 1604. The encounter marks a turning point in her life and the beginning of a deep spiritual friendship and partnership that would advance them both along their respective path to sanctity.

Francis was quite bold in expressing the unique quality of their friendship, as he wrote in one of his letters to her: "This then is the bond that unites us, these are the ties that hold us together, and the closer they draw us the more ease and freedom they will give us. Know then that I hold myself closely bound to you, and seek to know no more, save that this bond is not incompatible with other bonds, whether of vows or of marriage".

By then Francis de Sales had achieved the greatest fame through his book: "*An Introduction to the Devout Life*". This manual of devotion was quickly translated into many languages and it remains one of the classics in Christian spirituality. What was significant is that he addressed his invitation to holiness to all Christians, in any state of life, in this way anticipating Vatican II.

Since Francis was in love passionately with God and with all human beings, his look on people was fundamentally optimistic and he did not fail to invite everybody, according to his own expression, to bloom where they were planted. Saint Jane Frances de Chantal is Francis' partner in holiness.

Model of humanity

"God is the God of the human heart": in these seemingly simple words we see the essence of this great teacher of spirituality, St. Francis de Sales, bishop and doctor of the Church. His life was relatively short, but lived with great intensity. An impression of rare fulfillment emanates from this saint: a fulfillment apparent in the serenity of his intellectual research, but also in the richness of his affections, and in the "gentleness" of his teachings, which have had great influence on the Christian conscience. He embodied the several meanings of the word "humanity": culture and courtesy, liberty and tenderness, nobility and solidarity. His appearance, with his impressive beard and gentle countenance, had something of the majesty of the mountainous landscape in which he lived, also preserving simplicity and naturalness.

Saint Pio of Pietrelcina(1887-1968)

PADRE PIO SANTO

From tending the sheep, God called the young Francesco Forgione (1887-1968) to the priesthood in the Franciscan tradition of the Capuchins. Gifted with an extraordinary experience of God, Padre Pio, as he started calling himself since his Vows, from his convent cell attracted millions with his ministry of Confession and the power of his intercession. He carried the wounds of Christ (stigmata) in his body for fifty years. Canonized by pope John Paul II in 2002, Padre Pio is possibly the most popular miracle-worker Saint ever. Pope Francis has arranged that his body be venerated in S. Peter's Basilica during the Jubilee of Mercy.

An enormous crowd, a special concert and a spectacular late-evening fireworks show that lit up the Roman sky was the tribute paid to the Capuchin friar Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, during the event of his canonization on June 16, 2002. Some 300.000 pilgrims endured the blistering sun and suffocating temperature that reached 40C. Volunteers handed out over a million half-liter cartons of water and the fire department regularly sprayed water on the sweltering crowd to cool them down.

Twelve giant video screens were strategically placed down Via Conciliazione that runs from St. Peter's to the Tiber so that the great majority of those who had gathered could get a close-up of the outdoor sanctuary where the canonization was taking place. The event was the climax for the millions around the world who love, venerate and entrust their problems to the intercession of the humble friar of Pietralcina.

Tens of thousands of others joined in prayer to watch the ceremony on television in the new Saint's home town of Pietrelcina and in the shrine-hospital he inspired at San Giovanni Rotondo. The latter, where Padre Pio lived most of his life as a Capuchin friar, attracts more than seven million

visitors a year, surpassing the Marian shrine of Lourdes in popularity and second only to the site dedicated to our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico.

The son of peasant farmers

Francesco Forgione was born to Grazio Mario Forgione and Maria Giuseppa Di Nunzio on May 25, 1887, in Pietrelcina, a farming town in the southern Italian region of Campania. His parents made a living as peasant farmers. Francesco himself worked on the land up to the age of 10, looking after the small flock of sheep the family owned.

Pietrelcina was a town where feast days of saints were celebrated throughout the year, and the Forgione family was deeply religious. They attended daily Mass, prayed the Rosary nightly, and abstained from meat three days a week in honor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Although Francesco's parents and grandparents were illiterate, they memorized the scriptures and narrated Bible stories to their children. His mother said that Francesco was able to see and speak with Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and his guardian angel, and that as a child he assumed that all people could do so.

In 1897, after he had completed three years at the public school, Francesco was drawn to the life of a friar after listening to a young Capuchin friar who was in the countryside seeking donations. When Francesco expressed his desire to his parents, they made a trip to Morcone, a Franciscan community 21 km North of Pietrelcina, to find out if their son was eligible to enter the Capuchin Order. The friars there informed them that they were interested in accepting Francesco into their community, but he needed more education.

Francesco's father went to the United States in search of work to pay for private tutoring for his son, so that he might meet the academic requirements to enter the Capuchin Order. On January 6, 1903, at the age of 15, he entered the novitiate of the Capuchin friars at Morcone. On January 22, he took the Franciscan habit and the name of Fra (Friar) Pio, in honor of Pope St. Pius I, whose relic is preserved in the Santa Anna Chapel in Pietrelcina. At the conclusion of his novitiate, he took the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Commencing his seven-year study for the priesthood, Fra Pio traveled to the friary of St. Francis of Assisi by oxcart. It was during this time, together with his physical illness, that inexplicable phenomena began to occur. During prayer, Brother Pio appeared to be in a stupor, as if he were absent.

One of Pio's fellow friars claims to have seen him in ecstasy, levitating above the ground. On January 27, 1907, he still made his solemn profession.

In 1910, Brother Pio was ordained a priest by Archbishop Paolo Schinosi at the Cathedral of Benevento. Four days later, he offered his first Mass at the parish church of Our Lady of the Angels. His health being precarious, he was permitted to remain with his family until 1916 while still retaining the Capuchin habit.

Returning to community life, he moved to Our Lady of Grace Capuchin Friary, located in the Gargano Mountains in San Giovanni Rotondo, in the province of Foggia. He stayed at San Giovanni Rotondo until his death in 1968, except for military service.

When World War I started, four friars from this community were selected for military service. At that time, Padre Pio was a teacher at the seminary and a spiritual director. On November 15, 1915, he was drafted into the Italian army, but, due to poor health, he was declared unfit for military service and discharged. In all, his military service lasted 182 days.

The Stigmata and World War I

World War I continued to rage and in July 1918, Pope Benedict XV, who had termed the World War “a useless slaughter” and “the suicide of Europe”, appealed to all Christians urging them to pray for an end to the World War. On July 27 of the same year, Padre Pio offered himself as a victim for the end of the war. Days passed and between August 5 and August 7, Padre Pio had a vision in which Christ appeared and pierced his side. As a result, Padre Pio had a physical wound in his side. This occurrence is considered as a “transverberation” or piercing of the heart, indicating the union of love with God. He wrote: “From that day on I have been mortally wounded. I feel in the depths of my soul a wound that is always open and which causes me continual agony”.

On September 20, 1918, the pains of the transverberation ceased and Padre Pio was in profound peace. On that day, as he was engaged in prayer, the wounded Christ appeared again, and Padre Pio received the visible stigmata, the five wounds of Christ. This time, the stigmata were permanent. They stayed visible for the next fifty years of his life. On 8 August,

the Allies began the Hundred Days Offensive, which led to the armistice with Germany and the end of the war.

The gift of the stigmata made Padre Pio a kind of new Saint Francis of Assisi, only he carried them for fifty years, whereas Saint Francis only for two years. The blood flowing from the stigmata smelled of perfume or flowers, a phenomenon mentioned in stories of the lives of several saints and often referred to as the *odour of sanctity*.

Though Padre Pio would have preferred to suffer in secret, by early 1919, news about the stigmatic friar began to spread in the secular world. His wounds never became infected. At the time of Padre Pio's death, his body appeared unwounded, with no sign of stigmata. Padre Pio's wounds were examined by many people, including physicians. No satisfying human explanation was ever found.

The miracle worker

People who had started rebuilding their lives after World War I, began to see in Padre Pio a symbol of hope. Those close to him attest that he began to manifest several spiritual gifts, including the gifts of healing, bi-location, levitation, prophecy, miracles, extraordinary abstinence from both sleep and nourishment (one account states that Padre Pio was able to subsist for at least 20 days on only the Eucharist, without any other nourishment), the ability to read hearts, the gift of tongues, the gift of conversions.

Because of the unusual gifts Padre Pio was claimed to possess, the Holy See instituted investigations of the related accounts. As a consequence, the Vatican in the beginning imposed severe sanctions on Padre Pio to reduce publicity about him: it forbade him from saying Mass in public, blessing people, answering letters, showing his stigmata publicly, and communicating with his spiritual director.

From 1921 to 1922 he was prevented from publicly performing his priestly duties, such as hearing confessions and saying Mass. By 1933, the tide began to turn, prohibitions were lifted and Pope Pius XII, who assumed the papacy in 1939, encouraged devotees to visit Padre Pio.

In 1940, Padre Pio began plans to open a hospital in San Giovanni Rotondo, to be named "Home to Relieve Suffering." The hospital opened in 1956.

Barbara Ward, a British humanitarian and journalist on assignment in Italy, played a major role in obtaining for this project a grant of \$325,000 from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA).

In 1947, Father Karol Józef Wojtyła, a young Polish priest who was studying in Rome at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Angelicum*, visited Padre Pio, who heard his confession. During this meeting, Padre Pio told him he would one day ascend to "the highest post in the Church". John Paul II not only became the longest reigning pope of the contemporary times but is now a fellow canonized saint with Padre Pio whom he himself proclaimed Blessed and Saint (2002).

According to oral tradition, Bishop Wojtyła wrote to Padre Pio in 1962 to ask him to pray for Dr. Wanda Poltawska, a friend in Poland who was suffering from cancer. Later, Dr. Poltawska's cancer was found to be in spontaneous remission. Medical professionals were unable to offer an explanation for the phenomenon. Dr. Wanda was present at Padre Pio Canonization in Rome.

“Pray, hope and don’t worry”

Franciscan spirituality is characterized by a life of poverty, love of nature, and giving charity to those in need. Franciscan prayer recognizes God's presence in the wonder of creation. This is seen clearly in St. Francis' Canticle of the Sun. Franciscan spirituality is focused on walking in Christ's footsteps, understanding God by doing what Christ asked, experiencing and sharing God. Padre Pio was a model of all this.

As a spiritual director, he had five rules for spiritual growth: weekly confession, daily Communion, spiritual reading, meditation, and examination of conscience. He compared weekly confession to dusting a room weekly, and recommended the performance of meditation and self-examination twice daily: once in the morning, as preparation to face the day, and once again in the evening, as retrospection. His advice on the practical application of theology he often summed up in his now famous quote, "Pray, Hope and Don't Worry". He directed Christians to recognize God in all things and to desire above all things to do the will of God.

During his long life, millions of people who heard of him traveled to San Giovanni Rotondo in the South of Italy to meet him and confess to him and

ask for help. The novelist Graham Greene kept two photos of Padre Pio in his wallet after attending one of his Masses. He characteristically said: "Padre Pio has introduced a doubt in my disbelief." My own uncle, Oreste, threatened by bankruptcy and tempted to commit suicide, was advised to go to Padre Pio instead. He drove the length of Italy and lined up for confession. Padre Pio told him as soon as he saw him: "Don't worry, my son; you will survive the bankruptcy. Don't do anything to harm your life". And so it was. Padre Pio died in 1968 at the age of 81.

Early in the morning of September 23, 1968, Padre Pio made his last confession and renewed his Franciscan vows. Till the end, he repeated the words "Gesù, Maria" (Jesus, Mary). At around 2:30 a.m., he said, "I see two mothers" (taken to mean his mother and Mary). Then he died in his cell in San Giovanni Rotondo with his last breath whispering, "Maria!" His body was buried on September 26 in a crypt in the Church of Our Lady of Grace. His Requiem Mass was attended by over 100,000 people. He had often said, "After my death I will do more. My real mission will begin after my death."

The most popular Saint

Padre Pio was considered holy even during his lifetime. In 1971, three years after his death, Pope Paul VI said to the superiors of the Capuchin Order about the monk: "Look what fame he had, what a worldwide following gathered around him! But why? Perhaps because he was a philosopher? Because he was wise? Because he had resources at his disposal? Because he said Mass humbly, heard confessions from dawn to dusk and was—it is not easy to say it—one who bore the wounds of our Lord. He was a man of prayer and suffering".

Padre Pio believed that the love of God is inseparable from suffering, and that suffering all things for the sake of God is the way for the soul to reach God. He has become one of the world's most popular saints. There are more than 3000 "Padre Pio Prayer Groups" worldwide, with three million members. A 2006 survey by the magazine *Famiglia Cristiana* found that more Italian Catholics pray to Padre Pio for intercession than to any other figure. By now this can be applied worldwide.

The remains of Saint Pio will be brought to the Vatican for veneration during the 2015-2016 Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. Saint Pio and Saint Leopold Mandic, himself a Capuchin, have been designated as saint-

train and travelled to Maastricht, where they were required to register as Jews. "Praised be Jesus Christ!" a proud and defiant Edith called out as she entered the office of the Gestapo, overflowing with frightened Jews, a weeping Rose following close behind. Orders were screamed, the Jewish nun was insulted and humiliated. No one was waiting at the railway station late that night to welcome the Stein sisters back. They had to walk alone through the streets, yellow stars of David prominently displayed on their habits.

More than three years after the Nazi occupation of Holland, on Sunday, July 26, 1942, the Dutch bishops publicly condemned the deportation of the Jews. The German authorities, stung by the Catholic bishops' courageous intervention, increased their determination to do away with all the Jews, including those who had converted to Christianity. During the last year of her life and up to the last moment, Edith Stein had tried to find refuge for herself and Rose first in the Carmelite Convent in Bethlehem and then in Switzerland, but in vain. The dreaded moment finally arrived.

It was a beautiful, clear day with blue skies. A real summer day. The sisters were having their lunch. The door bell rang. Mother Antonia went to open and coming back she said: "They are here". A small crowd was gathering on the pavement opposite the convent's door. The Gestapo car was parked around the corner, engine idling. Edith and Rose were shoved into the van. In that moment, to her sister who was crying, Sr. Teresa Benedicta said: "Come, Rose, we are going for our people".

Survivors of the following days describe the nun's courage and composure despite the clear certainty of the fate that awaited her. She occupied herself with prayer while caring for the terrified children and consoling mothers separated from their husbands. Someone described her as "a Pietà without a Christ".

From the detention camp in Holland, she followed the same route as millions of others: the wretched journey by sealed railway carriage, the arrival half-starved at a strange camp amid snarling dogs and cursing guards, the infamous "selection", the stripping, then the brisk walk to the shower rooms, from which no one ever emerged.

Edith Stein died in a gas chamber, together with her sister Rose, at Auschwitz, on August 9, 1942. In 1987 she was beatified as a confessor and martyr of the Church by pope John Paul II, an event that provoked

controversy. Many Jews complained that Edith was killed as a Jew like millions of others and not because of her Christian faith. “But what is remarkable about Edith Stein’s death is not the manner of her death but her understanding of it: in solidarity with her people, as an act of atonement for the evil of her time, and as a conscious identification with the cross of Christ” (Robert Ellsberg).

Long before Stein had understood the terrible storm that was approaching and she felt in some way that her Jewish-Christian identity imposed a unique vocation on her. While praying at the Carmelite convent in Cologne, she later wrote: “I spoke with the Savior to tell him that I realized that it was his cross that was being laid upon the Jewish people, that the few who understood this had the responsibility of carrying it in the name of all and that myself was willing to do this, if Jesus would only show me how”. She was proclaimed saint on October 11, 1998.

The search for the truth

The facts of Stein’s life are these: she is the youngest of seven children of an observant Jewish family and was born on October 12, 1891. It was *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, a detail that became very dear to her at the end of her life. Her father died when she was two, leaving the mother run the family’s lumber business. “In my dreams, I always foresaw a brilliant future for myself” she writes in her unfinished autobiography *Life in a Jewish family*.

At 14, she left school and home to join her older sister in Hamburg. It was in this time and setting that she declared herself an atheist. She returned home to Breslau, graduated from the Gymnasium, and after a semester or two studying psychology, moved to Gottingen to study philosophy with the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl. “Little by little, I worked myself into a state of veritable despair” she writes in her autobiography of this time.

From reading the works of the reformer of the Carmelite Order, St. Teresa of Avila, especially her autobiography, Edith was drawn to the Christian faith. She was baptized on January 1, 1922 into the Roman Catholic Church. Edith’s mother wept when she heard the news of her daughter’s conversion. Faced with Edith’s resolution, however, she had little choice but to acquiesce. Edith continued to accompany her mother to the synagogue feeling that in accepting Christ, she had been re-united, by a mysterious path, to her Jewish roots.

A passionate young woman

Edith Stein had a rich, complex temperament. She was brilliant and planned an academic career, but was also a passionate young woman and dreamed of love and marriage. She stepped aside when she saw that her beloved sister Erna became engaged to Hans Biberstein, a dashing medical student both sisters had befriended. But when Erna and Hans got married, Edith had a mental breakdown, as she admits in her autobiography. “There is no doubt that Edith loved my father very much” declares Suzanne, the Bibersteins’ daughter.

Later on Edith was inconsolable when her fellow student, the handsome Hans Lips, did not return her love. Even after her conversion to Christianity and when she was considering consecrating herself totally to God, she still kept a photo of Hans Lips: her dream of a life with Hans Lips was not easily forgotten. “That won’t do” a close friend scolded her “You cannot plan to give yourself over to the Lord and have a photo of the man who refused to marry you on your desk”. Actually, her friend was wrong: it is the passionate quality of Edith’s friendships that made her a mystic, a lover of God.

She had a very long, close friendship with Roman Ingarden, a fellow student who was to become one of the professors of Karol Wojtyla, the future John Paul II, and with Adolf Reinach, Husserl’s assistant, who volunteered to the front in World War One and was killed in the eastern front. Dr. Stein took over his position as assistant to Husserl and the example of Reinach’s widow, Anna, was instrumental to her conversion. She narrates of her visit to Anna and how she found the young woman unexpectedly serene and composed because of her newly-found Christian faith.

Another man occupied a great place in her life : during the years of her militancy as a Catholic teacher and speaker, she developed a warm and emotionally rewarding relationship with Raphael Walzer, the young, dynamic archabbot of the Benedictine monastery in Beuron who became her Spiritual Director.

Unheeded prophecies

In 1933 both Stein and Dom Walzer were alarmed by the rise of Hitler. Politically astute and farsighted, Edith feared the impending Vatican alliance

with Germany. Daringly, she requested a private audience with pope Pius XI and sent him a letter when that was denied.

“As a child of the Jewish people who, by the grace of God, for the past eleven years has also been a child of the Catholic Church, I dare to speak to the Father of Christianity about that which oppresses millions of Germans... For years the leaders of National Socialism have been preaching hatred of the Jews...Everything that happened and continues to happen on a daily basis originates with a government that calls itself 'Christian.' For weeks not only Jews but also thousands of faithful Catholics in Germany, and, I believe, all over the world, have been waiting and hoping for the Church of Christ to raise its voice to put a stop to this abuse of Christ's name”(*Letter to Pope Pius XI*).

Stein's letter received no answer, and it is not known for sure whether Pius XI ever even read it. The Concordat agreement between the Vatican and Berlin took place. Four years later, however, the pope issued an encyclical, written in German, *Mit brennender Sorge (With burning Anxiety)*, in which he criticized Nazism, listed breaches of the Concordat signed between Germany and the Church in 1933, and condemned anti-Semitism. But it was too late.

In the meantime, Stein had lost her teaching job because of the racial laws. Only then, when she was no longer employable, the spiritual adviser abbot Walzer finally granted Edith's request and she entered the convent in Cologne. She wrote movingly of her farewell to her beloved Orthodox Jewish mother in her native Breslau. None of her family was present on April 15, 1934, to witness her formal clothing as a Carmelite habit.

She took as her religious name Sister Teresa Benedicta *a Cruce* –blessed by the Cross. It was a name, she later explained, chosen to refer “to the fate of the people of God, which even then was beginning to reveal itself”. She had come to feel that the measures against the Jews were God's heavy hand upon his people and that the Savior's cross was now been placed upon the Jews. “The fate of this people would also be mine”, she writes with prescience.

In April 1938, a plebiscite concerning the annexation of Austria took place. Stein implored the nuns of the convent to vote “no”. Mother Renata, then head of the convent, recalls: “She lobbied indefatigably, raising her otherwise gentle voice. She said: “Hitler is the enemy of God and will ruin

Germany”. Nobody listened carried away as they were by the wave of nationalism. Later, they will regret it, but in vain.

Edith had entered the Carmelite convent in Cologne when she was 42, in October 1933. After *Kristallnacht*, the pogrom of November 9, 1938, it was no longer safe for the nuns in Cologne to associate with, let alone harbor, a non-Aryan nun. And so, hastily, asylum was found for her in the Carmelite convent at Echt, in the neutral Holland.

Her letters from that time show her sorrow and increasing worry about her siblings’ fate. She learned of the deportation of her sister Frieda and her brother Paul and his wife. Her sister Erna had mercifully booked a passage for the United States at the last hour, but didn’t dare to visit Edith and Rose to bid farewell. And in November 1941, news reached her that her very special friend Hans Lipps had been fatally shot at the eastern front. The final sacrifice was approaching.

The healing task of the Saints

There is no doubt that the Catholic Church is embarrassed about the compliant role of many of her members during World War II, especially during the holocaust. On the other hand, Pope John Paul II visited Auschwitz to seek pardon, and the reconciliation between Jews and Catholic continues. The canonization of Edith Stein may positively be seen as a powerful symbol of this rapprochement, in the eyes of both Catholics and Jews.

Pope John Paul II, during Edith Stein’s beatification, said: “Today, we greet in profound honor and holy joy, a daughter of the Jewish people, rich in wisdom and courage, who gave her life for genuine peace”. The Pope acknowledged Stein’s Jewish roots and asserted that her baptism “was by no means a break with her Jewish heritage”, but he added: “The life of this heroic follower of Christ was illuminated by the cross”.

Edith Stein had no thought of escaping the fate of her people. In fact she prepared a solemn prayer which she delivered to the prioress: “ I offer myself to the heart of Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement for the Jewish people, for the aversion of war and for the sanctification of my Carmelite family”. Having contemplated and faced the reality of death, she was delivered from further anxiety, and thus prepared to await the end.

God to gather the spiritual legacy of her contemporary, the great Therese of Lisieux. Like the Little Flower, she also entered the Carmelites and became the mystic of God, the Trinity, indwelling in our soul.

Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity was born in France in 1880, and grew up in Dijon, close to the city's Carmelite monastery. One time, when Elizabeth was 17, she visited the monastery. Then it happened that the mother superior there said, 'I just received this circular letter about the death of Therese of Lisieux, and I want you to read it.' That circular letter would later become "The Story of a Soul"; in fact, what Elizabeth was given was really the first edition of "The Story of a Soul".

It was an enlightening moment in her life, where everything kind of crystallized and she understood how to respond to what God was doing in her heart. She already was a very pious person who worked with troubled youth and catechized them, but when she read "The Story of a Soul", she knew she needed to become a Carmelite: it was a discovering moment in her life, when everything came together and she understood how to respond to God's call .

She already had a glimpse of her mission. She understood that to love souls all the way was to help them find and encounter the Lord. We can call it contemplative prayer, or even mystical prayer. Elizabeth later wrote that her mission was to lead souls out of themselves and into a great silence, where God could imprint himself in them, on their souls, so that they became God's dwelling place.

So, the spiritual missions of Therese of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity coincide: the two young women mystics threw light on the theology of grace, first by their spiritual experience and then by their writings. Great theologians like Hans Urs von Balthasar recognized that. And these very modern saints have both influenced the Church in the 20th and early 21st centuries in very powerful way. Since them, the understanding of spiritual life has never been the same.

A military environment

Elizabeth Catez was born in July 1880. Her father, Joseph, had enlisted in the French army. Also his wife Marie Rolland was herself the daughter of a successful military man. Spending her earliest years in this military environment, Elizabeth was naturally formed in such virtues as courage and forthrightness. From her earliest years, Elizabeth's personality was also marked by a determined, energetic disposition which, however, often became violent, resulting in fits of rage.

The year 1887 marked a great change in the seven-year-old Elizabeth. In October, her father, Joseph, died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of fifty-five. Madame Catez and her two children (Elizabeth and Marguerite) soon moved from their former house to an apartment in the suburbs of Dijon. From the window of her room in her new home, Elizabeth could see the monastery of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns.

After the death of her father, Elizabeth's outbursts of anger increased both in number and in violence. During the course of the same year, though, the child experienced for the first time the sacrament of Penance, which brought about what she described as her 'conversion'. It was only four years later, however, that the future Saint managed finally to conquer her difficult temperament. In the spring of 1891, when she was almost eleven years old, Elizabeth made her First Communion.

“The House of God”

On the afternoon of her First Communion, Elizabeth also encountered the prioress of the Carmel of Dijon for the first time. The prioress, upon learning the name of the child, explained to her that "Elizabeth" means "house of God." She added: "Your blessed name hides a mystery, accomplished on this great day. Child, your heart is the House of God on earth, of the God of love."

Furthermore, in February of 1900, the young aspirant to the Carmel of Dijon was introduced to a Dominican friar, a friend of the nuns. Elizabeth asked for help in understanding her interior experience: her need for silence and recollection, and her sense of an inexplicable presence in the depth of her soul.

This Dominican proceeded to deepen her awareness of the truth of the indwelling of the Trinity in the soul of the baptized: that not just Christ, but that "all three of the Trinity - Father, Son, and Spirit - were present in love in her soul. This graced meeting greatly reassured Elizabeth and aided her in her spiritual progress.

Finally, in 1901, Elizabeth entered her beloved Carmel, receiving the name "Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity." Her awareness and experience of the Triune God dwelling within her continued to grow. It became her original approach to the life of grace.

“Praise of Glory”

In a letter written just a few weeks before her death in the year 1906, the young Carmelite nun declared to a friend: "My beloved Antoinette, I leave you my faith in the presence of God, of the God who is all Love dwelling in our souls. I confide to you: it is this intimacy with Him 'within' that has been the beautiful sun illuminating my life, making it already an anticipated Heaven: it is what sustains me today in my suffering.'

Elizabeth of the Trinity, has since been given such titles as "the prophet of the presence of God," "the saint of the divine indwelling". Even the Catechism of the Catholic Church cites the "Elevation to the Holy Trinity", the extraordinary prayer that she composed and addressed to the Trinity whom she knew dwelled in her soul. In it her passion of love and her surrender to the Divine Guest are expressed in such burning terms that, in some parts, the prayer has almost an erotic touch that reminds us of the "Song of Songs".

The Catechism cites Saint Elizabeth's prayer to illustrate the truth that "Even now we are called to be a dwelling place for the Most Holy Trinity": 'If a man loves me,' says Jesus "he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him." (*John 14,23*)".

At the end of her life, she began to call herself "*Laudem Gloriam*." Elizabeth wanted that to be her appellation in Heaven because it means "praise of glory." She said: "I think that in Heaven my mission will be to draw souls by helping them to go out of themselves in order to cling to God by a wholly

Spanish population had been unexpectedly fierce and the subsequent repression of the French army harsh and cruel. On March 3 1808, the defenders of Madrid had been executed by firing squad, an episode made immortal by the famous painting by Goya.

Among the deserters, because of a series of strange circumstances, there was also an eager student for the priesthood, John Mary Vianney. Towards the end of the year 1808, the pressure of the Spanish campaign had caused the abolition of the exemption regarding the ecclesiastical students and John Mary Vianney found himself drafted into Napoleon's army. Two days before he had to report at Lyons, he became ill and was hospitalized, during which time his draft left without him. Once released from the hospital, on 5 January 1809, he was sent to Roanne for another draft. The morning of departure, John Mary went to church to pray, and on his return to the barracks, found that his comrades had already left.

He was threatened with arrest, but the recruiting captain believed his story and sent him after the troops. At nightfall, he met with a young man who volunteered to guide him back to his group, but instead led him deep into the mountains where deserters had gathered. John Mary lived there for fourteen months, hidden in the cow-shed attached to the farmhouse of a widow with four children. He assumed the name Jerome Vincent, and under that name, he opened a school for the village children. An imperial decree, proclaimed in March 1810, granted amnesty to all deserters and enabled Vianney to go back legally to Ecully, where he resumed his studies for the priesthood.

A faith strengthened by persecution

John Baptist Mary Vianney was born on May 8 1786, in the French town of Dardilly and was baptized the same day. His parents, Matthew and Mary Beluze, had six children, of whom John was the third. The Vianneys were Catholics who practiced their faith and helped the poor. Among others, they gave hospitality to Saint Benedict Joseph Labre, the patron saint of tramps, who passed through Dardilly on his pilgrimage to Rome. By 1790, the French Revolution forced many loyal priests to hide from the government in order to carry out the sacraments in their parish.

The Vianneys continued attending Mass, even though it was illegal. In order to attend Mass, the Vianneys travelled to distant farms where they would pray in secret. Since priests would risk their lives day by day, John Mary began to look upon them as heroes. First among them was Fr. Balley, their parish priest, who became his greatest inspiration. John Mary made his First Communion at the age of 13. During the Mass, the windows were covered so that the light of the candles could not be seen from the outside. The

secrecy of his Catholic practices continued, especially during his preparation for Confirmation. In 1802, the Catholic Church was re-established in France, resulting in religious peace throughout the country. By this time, John Mary was concerned about his future vocation and longed for an education.

He was 20 when his father allowed him to leave the farm to be taught at Father Balley's "presbytery-school", in the neighboring village of Ecully. The school taught arithmetic, history, geography, and Latin. John Mary struggled, especially with Latin, since his past education had been interrupted by the French Revolution. If it wasn't for his deepest desire to be a priest and Father Balley's patience, he would have given up his struggle to continue. His difficulties in making the preparatory studies seem to have been due to the meagerness of his early schooling, the relative advanced age at which he began to study and the fact that he was far advanced in spiritual science and in the practice of virtue, long before he came to study it in the abstract.

Back from the mountains in 1810, he tried the seminary, but he had to go back to Fr. Balley and it is with him that he completed his formation and was ordained a priest on August 12 1815. He said his first Mass the next day and was appointed assistant to Fr Balley.

The Curate of Ars

Shortly after the death of Father Balley, Fr. John Mary was appointed pastor of the parish of Ars, a town of 230 souls. As the pastor of Ars, he realized that the consequence of the Revolution was a great religious ignorance, due to many years of persecution and neglect of the Catholic Church in France. At the time, Sundays in rural areas were spent in the fields working, or dancing and drinking in taverns. The young priest was astonished, especially since Sundays were meant to be reserved for religion. He dedicated himself to the confessional and gave homilies railing on blasphemy and dancing.

It was in the exercise of the functions of parish priest in this remote French hamlet that the "Curate of Ars" became known throughout France and the Christian world. A few years after he went to Ars, he founded a sort of orphanage for destitute girls. It was called "The Providence" and was the model of similar institutions established later all over France. Fr. John Mary himself instructed the children of "The Providence" in the catechism, and these catechetical instructions came to be so popular that at last they were given every day in the church to large crowds.

These are some of his colorful expressions: “Man is a beggar who needs to ask God for everything”. –“ All our religion is but a false religion, and all our virtues are mere illusions and we ourselves are only hypocrites in the sight of God, if we have not that universal charity for everyone - for the good, and for the bad, for the poor and for the rich, and for all those who do us harm as much as those who do us good”. - “This is the glorious duty of man: to pray and to love. If you pray and love, that is where a man’s happiness lies”.

But the chief labor of the Curate of Ars was the direction of souls. He had not been long at Ars when people began coming to him from other parishes, then from distant places, then from all parts of France, and finally from other countries. As early as 1835, his bishop forbade him to attend the annual retreats of the diocesan clergy because of the souls waiting for him. During the last ten years of his life, he spent from sixteen to eighteen hours a day in the confessional. His advice was sought by bishops, priests, religious, young men and women in doubt as to their vocation, sinners, persons in all sorts of difficulties and the sick. In 1855, the number of pilgrims had reached twenty thousand a year. And yet Fr. John Mary yearned for the contemplative life of a monk, and four times ran away from Ars, the last time in 1853.

His spiritual direction was characterized by common sense, remarkable insight, and supernatural knowledge. He would sometimes divine sins withheld in an imperfect confession. His instructions were simple in language, full of imagery drawn from daily life and country scenes, but breathing faith and that love of God which was his life principle and which he infused into his audience as much by his manner and appearance as by his words, for, at the last, his voice was almost inaudible.

On August 4 1859, he died at age 73. He became internationally renowned for his priestly and pastoral work in his parish and because of the radical spiritual transformation of the community and its surroundings. Catholics attribute this to his saintly life, mortification, and persevering ministry in the sacrament of confession. In 1925 Pope Pius XI canonized him, He was made patron saint of parish priests in 1929. In honor of the 150th anniversary of Vianney's death, Pope Benedict XVI declared a Year for Priests, running from the feast of the Sacred Heart 2009 until the same occasion in 2010.

The “virtuous” circle

Generally, in the universal church, the pope’s initiative of the “Year of the Priests” has been accepted with enthusiasm. There is the need of an injection of optimism and esteem

