

## SAINTS IN OUR DAY

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**S**AINTS ARE INSTRUMENTS of God's providence. The lives of the saints canonized at any particular time in history should reflect both the timeless other-worldliness of the Church and its temporal concern and anxious care for contemporary problems.

Sometimes special saints are raised up by God to recall the truths seemingly forgotten by a particular age. St. Vincent Ferrer thundered to his contemporaries the truth of the judgments of God waiting for all men. St. Bridget of Sweden and St. Catharine of Siena pleaded for a return to the truth of the unity of God's Church and the supreme authority of His Vicar on earth. At other times, God through His saints shows us how the old truths may be adapted to new situations by new methods of spreading and guarding the faith. The Friars Preachers and the Friars Minor founded by St. Dominic and St. Francis of Assisi were two such innovations. Thus the history of the Church presents through her saints a two-fold pattern of life: the fabric of old truths constantly renewed and the multi-colored threads of new applications to meet contemporary needs.

This pattern is again renewed in the 20th century. "The times indeed are greatly changed, but, as we have more than once repeated, nothing is changed in the life of the Church." Thus spoke St. Pius X at the dawn of the century. What, then, can we learn from a closer study of the saints in our day? Does Divine Providence speak to us again in the year 1958 through the lives of the saints? Are there any truths given especially for our times that would become evident through a study of modern saints? We think that there are and hope to bring these before the reader in this brief survey, which will be limited to saints canonized in the past 58 years.

There have been 65 saints canonized in the 20th century. Only four of them have died in this century: Maria Goretti, Gemma Galgani, Pius X and Frances Cabrini. Thirty-seven of them died in the 18th and 19th centuries and 28 in the three previous centuries. Some of them have become well-known through their writings and lives; others, after waiting for centuries to be canonized, remain still in relative obscurity, destined perhaps to win the popular acclaim at some future date. They include founders of new religious societies, men of great learning, missionaries, martyrs, pious laity, holy virgins and even a hermit, Nicholas of Flue. Yet the life of each one of these saints reflects (in its own unique way) some aspect of the multi-faceted beauty of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Paradoxically, the centuries when the Church had to contend with the greatest evils saw the emergence also of the greatest number of saints. Numerous souls within the Church were stimulated to sanctity during the period of the Protestant Revolt and the Counter-Reformation. Then came the withering intellectual rationalism of the Enlightenment in the 18th century and the number declined. As we move into our modern period we note that during the 19th century when the Church was largely on the defensive, the number increased again. It is still too soon to evaluate the number and influence of saints during the 20th century but the Popes have pointed out the special areas of conflict which, strangely, will determine both the magnitude of the evils of our time and their remedies.

St. Pius X had sounded the warning bell against one such evil in his encyclical against modernism. The tone of the bell took its key from the fact that man in the 20th century was making himself an end, a goal. The Pope pointed out that what was evil in the term "modernism" was not progress in man's control over nature, but a substitution of man in the place of God. Against this perversion the Gospel message is piercingly clear. Those who use this message from God as their norm of life, that is, God's saints, naturally stand out in sharp contrast to a man-centered way of thinking and acting. Man's very achievements and remarkable advances in science, art, and technology had led him into thinking of himself as self-sufficient. But the truth is quite different as we see clearly in the lives of the saints canonized during this same century of rapid and startling changes.

As Pius X shrewdly probed into the root evils of a modern world, so also he saw the remedies. The remedy is basically the

same for all Christians—holiness of life. He had recognized the effectiveness of that remedy in the sanctity of a young Carmelite nun—Theresa of the Child Jesus—who was to give new encouragement to the world by her spiritual doctrine of the “little way.” Theresa’s answer to man’s self sufficiency was simply to state: “To rely on God as a child relies on its parents, is the only way to live as we are intended to live.” Pius X’s own life showed the “little way” could be cultivated by even the highest dignitary of the Church.

God seems to be pointing out this lesson to us even more emphatically by the somewhat remarkable fact that He gives us in the 20th century the lives of children and young people to show us His way. Not since the days of the Roman persecutions have so many children and young people stirred such popular devotion. To take their places beside Agnes and Lucy, Agatha and Tarsicius we have had since 1900 Maria Goretti, Dominic Savio, Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin, Gemma Galgani, Joan of Arc, the Little Flower and Bernadette of Lourdes. Their youth and holy innocence is a constant reminder to us that the Church places purity of life and the real simplicity of a child above sophistication and worldly knowledge.

The year 1950 saw the canonization of the twelve-year-old girl Maria Goretti, as a martyr and the beatification of the fifteen-year-old boy, Dominic Savio, as a confessor. There have been child-martyr saints in the past, but the case of Dominic Savio, who was canonized in 1954, seems to be unique. His cause met with some opposition on the ground of his extreme youth. Like Theresa of the Child Jesus his life was exteriorly uneventful; no miracles, long and severe fasts, visions, etc. He sums up his short life thus, “I can’t do big things. But I want all I do, even the smallest thing, to be for the greater glory of God.”

The dramatic story of the life of Maria Goretti has captured the enthusiasm of intellectuals and working class alike. To an age which winks its eye at sexual amorality, the death of this child is a wonder and marvel of grace. Her life was especially singled out by Pope Pius XII as a lesson to our times of the high moral value the Church places on purity of mind and body.

Nothing so surprises us about the lives of some saints as their seemingly commonplace existence and sometimes absolute obscurity. “What will we put in her obituary? She did nothing,” observed a Carmelite nun on hearing of the approaching death of St. Theresa. St. Conrad of Parzham did nothing but answer the

door of his monastery. St. Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin died at 24, an ordinary scholastic, preparing for the priesthood. St. Gemma Galgani's life was in one sense uneventful. She died at 24 after enduring intense suffering, unable even to fulfill her desire to be a Passionist nun. On the other hand, there are some saints who are well known during their lifetime, who achieve great works, whose fame is assured because the people learn to love them. We need only recall St. Bernard, St. Dominic or St. Vincent de Paul.

There is one work, one activity which is the concern of every saint: that of the salvation of souls. Sometimes a saint will dedicate his life to secret prayer and suffering for souls, but more often the saint's life takes the form of well-known apostolic activity. The vast majority of the saints in our survey fall into this category. The proportion of founders and members of active orders greatly outbalances the contemplative. In this group of 20th century canonized saints are founders of new religious congregations and societies that have adapted themselves in a great variety of ways to meet modern needs. Included also are members of older orders who have revitalized and expanded the work of the original founders. Quite often the founders themselves have not envisioned all the applications God will make of their work in spreading the faith and increasing wisdom and virtue among the faithful. It is in this area of the Church's activity that we see her marvelous adaptability to current needs.

Long before state systems of universal education were made a part of our everyday life, John Baptist de la Salle was starting his schools and teaching brotherhood for the education of all classes of people. At a time when the dominant educational theory was that it was wrong on principle to teach the children of the poor anything besides manual trades, he not only taught them to read and write, but taught them other subjects as well, and these in the vernacular—another innovation. He was the first to teach on a class group rather than an individual instruction basis. He established the first training college for teachers at Rheims in the 17th century. St. John Baptist de la Salle was canonized in 1900 and today his brothers are teaching rich and poor alike throughout the Christian world.

Another saint who successfully met some of the problems of modern technical development is John Bosco. His original work, with what we would call today juvenile delinquents, expanded to include schools ranging from the primary grades to colleges and

seminaries; adult education schools; technical schools; agricultural schools; printing and book-binding shops; hospitals and foreign missions. Thousands of Salesian institutes are thriving today all over the world. Not only are subjects geared to help young people in a practical way, but the Salesian spirit is made to permeate all their work in this modern world. This spirit of joy takes the form of the preventive system in working with youth. It tries to avoid repressive measures, relies on the influence of a good environment and the amount and attractiveness of the work to "keep them busy" and thus out of trouble. This system was developed on the practical level some time before John Dewey advocated the same methods, based, however, on a different set of principles.

Mention should be made of the women's branch of the Salesians which does much the same type of work among young girls. St. John Bosco helped St. Mary Mazzarello, who was, like St. John, a rugged peasant type gifted with great prudence and practical direction, in the foundation of this new congregation.

"The poor you will always have with you." To provide for their needs God has raised up saints in each century. Typical is St. Joseph Cottolengo, founder of the Societies of the Little House of Divine Providence. His "Piccola Casa" in Turin, although not so well-known outside of Italy, is still in operation serving the sick, deaf and dumb, orphans and waifs of that city. Another is St. Frances Cabrini, the first canonized American saint. Her work among the Italian immigrants of New York City and Chicago is well-known. Her society, the Mission Sisters of the Sacred Heart, is active now in the large urban centers of North and South America, living witness to the seemingly boundless energy of the foundress.

"The poor have the Gospel preached to them," said Our Lord, pointing to this fact as a sign of His authentic mission from God. To join the ranks of the older orders and congregations in this apostolate, new mission societies have been founded. The Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was founded by St. Anthony Claret, Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba. His bull of canonization in 1950 mentions his encouragement of Catholic Action, a work which the Claretians continue in America today. The Congregation of the Precious Blood, founded by Caspar del Bufalo is yet another example of the missionary zeal of the Church. Blessed Vincent Pallotti, a good friend of St. Caspar, is credited by Pope Pius XI as the pioneer and forerunner of Cath-

olic Action. The work of the *Pallottini* among immigrants is especially notable.

The names of some of these new societies and congregations reflect new devotions promulgated by some of the saints canonized in this period. The Office of the Precious Blood is comparatively recent. St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and St. John Eudes, two saints canonized during the century, helped to spread the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The latter was called by Pope Leo XIII "the institutor of the liturgical cultus of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Holy Heart of Mary." The devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary springs renewed, of course, from Fatima. St. Catharine Labouré's vocation was to help give to the world the devotion centered around the Miraculous Medal. The canonization of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort in 1947 renewed interest in the "True Devotion" to Mary, Mother of God.

The Church today is acclaimed for the work of her hierarchy, her theologians and philosophers, her artists and poets. But we must never forget that her mark of sanctity is always recognizable in the lives of her saints. There are saints in the Church now, perhaps leading hidden lives, perhaps soon to be well-known. All of them show forth God's wisdom and goodness through their actions.

"We are like the marionettes of a puppet-show. As long as they are held by a hand from above they walk, jump, dance and give signs of agility and life: they represent . . . now a king now a clown . . . but as soon as the performance is over they are dropped and huddled together ingloriously in a dusty corner. So it is with us: amid the multiplicity of our various functions we are held and moved by the hand of Providence. Our duty is to enter into its designs to play the part assigned to us . . . and respond promptly and trustfully to the impulses received from on high."—St. Joseph Cottolengo



"The miraculously swift conversion of the world to the Christian faith is the most certain witness to the miracles of primitive Christianity; so that there is no real need for these to be repeated, since their original force is clearly shown by the magnitude of their effect which still endures. For it would be more to be marvelled at than all miracles put together, had simple men, low in worldly estate, been able without such miraculous signs to induce the world to believe such lofty truths, to perform such difficult actions, and to hold such exalted hopes. Yet as a matter of fact God has not ceased to work miracles for the strengthening of the faith, through his saints." *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 6.