

Lives of the Saints - Relics

St. Aloysius Gonzaga (1568-1591) Born into a wealthy family, he had a very profound spiritual awakening at age 7 that led him by age 13 to a life of prayerful asceticism and an intense desire to become a Jesuit missionary. While a seminarian and caring for plague victims, he became ill and died 3 months later at age 23. Feast-day: June 21; patron of Catholic teens and youth.

St. Ananias (First century) A devout Christian at Damascus, he was commanded by Christ in a vision to seek out Saul (later Paul), who had just dramatically encountered Jesus while on the road there. Finding Saul blind, he healed, converted and baptized him. After seeing Paul start his work as a missionary, Ananias went to Eleutheropolis, where he was martyred.

St. Anne: Mother of the Virgin Mary (First century) While there is nothing reliable known of Jesus' maternal grandparents, legend supplies their names as Anne and Joachim. Testimony to their holiness is found in the life of their daughter, Mary, whom they raised observantly to be the beautiful Mother of the world's Redeemer. Feast-day: July 26; patron of grandparents.

St. Anthony Mary Claret (1807-1870) A textile weaver, he became a priest at age 28, a popular preacher of devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and Rosary, and founded the Claretians who still run a Catholic publishing house he began. While a bishop, he was nearly assassinated for opposing slavery and immorality; he forgave his would-be-killer and helped change a death penalty sentence to life imprisonment. Feast-day: October 24; patron of weavers and savings.

St. Anthony of Padua (1195-1231) While illness prevented him from becoming a missionary to the Moors, he lived as a Franciscan hermit, praying, reading scripture, performing menial tasks. When "volunteered" to preach at an ordination because no one else was prepared, he spoke so well that he became a theology teacher, a popular preacher, and wrote "homily helps" to assist other preachers. Feast-day: June 13; patron of the poor, travelers, and lost items.

St. Bernadette Soubiroux (1844-1879) At Lourdes, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared 18 times to this poorly educated, virtuous young lady, identifying herself as the Immaculate Conception. After years of doubt, harassment and scrutiny, these apparitions were authenticated; weary of public attention, Bernadette entered the convent of the Sisters of Notre Dame, served there as a sacristan and in the convent infirmary, only to die of ill health at age 35. Feast-day: April 16.

St. Camillus de Lellis (1550-1614) Raised by a widowed father who neglected his upbringing, he was a quarrelsome youth given to excessive fighting and gambling; he tried to be a soldier, but was dishonorably discharged from the army. An incurable leg-sore caused him to be rejected from religious communities; he founded his own, dedicated to care for the sick; he started the first recorded military field hospital. Feast-day: July 18; patron of hospitals and nurses.

St. Dominic Savio (1842-1857) Born to a peasant family, by age 12 this natural peacemaker and organizer was a student in the Oratory taught by St. John Bosco; he wanted to become a priest, to work alongside Don Bosco with neglected youth in the street gangs of Turin. He spent hours in prayer and helped any way he could; in frail health, he died at age 15. Feast-day: March 10; patron of choirboys and juvenile delinquents.

St. Elizabeth (First Century) Wife of a Jewish priest, Zechariah, they were devout and probably past child-bearing ages when an angel appeared to Zechariah in the Temple at hour of incense to reveal that they would soon conceive and have a son to be named John who would become a prophet known as the Baptist. When visited by Mary, soon-to-be mother of Jesus, Elizabeth's baby leaped for joy and she had prophetic insight, calling the infant in Mary's womb "my Lord" and praising Mary's special role in God's plan for salvation in words that form part of the "Hail Mary." Feast-day: November 05; patron of new evangelization.

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini (1850-1917) Immigrant religious sister and first US citizen canonized; educated to be a teacher, she worked with orphans and wanted to go to missions in China, but was sent west to the US to help Italian immigrants who were losing their faith. She founded 67 hospitals, orphanages and schools in 35 years of hard work. Feast-day: November 13; patron of hospital administrators, immigrants and impossible causes.

St. Francis Xavier (1506-1552) A teacher of philosophy who set aside a promising career at the invitation of a friend, Ignatius of Loyola; he became one of the first Jesuits. Ordained a priest in 1537, he sailed to Goa to preach to Hindus, Japanese and Malaysians. He shared their lifestyle, cared for the poor and sick, especially lepers, slept little, and started many missions that others continued after he died on an island 100 miles from Hong Kong, on his way to China. Feast-day: December 3; patron of Japan and missionaries.

St. Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows (1838-1862) From a large family that lost his mother when he was age 4, he was educated by Jesuits and, because he was 2X cured of serious illnesses, he believed God was calling him to be a priest. Too young to be a Jesuit, he joined the Passionists. They thought he would be a great success as a priest; he was popular, cheerful, prayerful, and thoughtful of the poor and of people's feelings. However, while a novice, he became seriously ill and died. Feast-day: February 27; patron of clergy.

St. Gerard Majella (1726-1755) Pious, he became a household servant and a tailor to help his family after his father died; he lived austerely, sharing his earnings with the poor. He became a Redemptorist brother and was known for mystical ecstasies while praying, bilocation, prophecy, and knowledge of the secret state of people's souls. He was sought after as an adviser, able to feed/clothe large numbers of beggars daily (no one was sure where his supplies came from), and was regarded as a miracle-worker. Feast-day: October 16; patron of women in childbirth.

St. John Berchmans (1599-1621) Having a keen interest in acting and education when told he had to leave school and learn a trade to support his family, he asked to become a priest. He entered Jesuit novitiate and impressed everyone with his simple spiritual life. When sent to Rome for advanced studies, the hot summer weather and stressful study for a public debate caused his health to decline, and he died of an illness never diagnosed. Feast-day: August 13.

St. John Bosco (1815-1888) Ordained a priest in 1841, he always wanted to do youth work. He met an orphan, readied him for first Holy Communion, and discovered unruly youth needed vocational educations. He began programs to train boys as printers, shoemakers, and tailors. He rejected corporal punishment in his schools, emphasizing a culture of love which he claimed removed likelihood of sin. He established a Catholic press, founding the Salesians to continue and expand his work. Feast-day: January 31; patron of boys, editors and youth.

St. John Neumann (1811-1860) Born and educated in the now Czech Republic, he came to the US to be ordained a priest at age 25. After 4 years of mission work, he joined the Redemptorist order and was the first member to profess vows in the US. Especially effective with the German speaking immigrants, he worked in 3 states before being named bishop of Philadelphia. There he re-organized Catholic schools, increasing enrollment; an able organizer, he drew talented religious educators to work with him; the first American bishop beatified. Feast-day: January 5.

St. John Vianney (1786-1859) A young man with a poor head for studies who wanted nothing else than to be a priest, he needed a private tutor to finish seminary studies. Viewed as not very capable, he was sent to a small parish in Ars that had grown indifferent to religion, morally lax and materialistic. He fasted, slept little, prayed much, preached simply, and spent 11-12 hours daily hearing confessions. Despite age and "attacks by the devil," he never retired and is buried in the church he served all his life. Feast-day: August 4; patron of parish priests.

St. Jude (First century) This apostle, named Jude in the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles, called Thaddeus in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, is only mentioned when the list of names of the Apostles is recounted. He may have written the Epistle of Jude (author calls himself "the brother of James"), but not likely. He had the same name as Judas Iscariot, but it's shortened in English to avoid confusion with Jesus' betrayer. Feast-day: October 28 (with Simon, Apostle).

St. Laurentia (d. 302) A young virgin martyr who was a household slave converted to the faith by her mistress, Palatias, while they lived in Ancona, Italy. During the persecution by Emperor Diocletian, she was arrested and put to death. Feast-day: October 19.

St. Lucy (d. 304) A young virgin martyr, brought up Christian in a wealthy family, who wished to devote her life to God and give her fortune to the poor. A soldier tried to rape her, but she was successful in resisting him; he denounced her as a Christian; she was arrested, tortured & killed. Feast-day: December 13; patron of those with eye troubles.

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) After considering marriage, she became a Visitation nun. After a difficult adjustment to convent life, in 1674 she began to experience 13 months of private revelation from Jesus, the Sacred Heart, His human heart symbolizing Divine love for an indifferent world. He asked her to spread devotion to Him through frequent reception of Holy Communion, especially on First Fridays, and inaugurating a feast-day. Her sisters were hostile, priests called her delusional; her confessor found her genuine. Feast-day: October 16.

St. Maria Goretti (1890-1902) Less than 12 years old, unable to read or write, she was mending a shirt on her front steps when an 18 year old boy stopped, grabbed her, and pulled her into a bedroom. As he tried to rape her, she said no, cried for help, telling him “this is a sin that you will go to hell for.” Angrily, he stabbed her many times. Hospitalized, she forgave her attacker, received Holy Communion and died. He was given a 30 year prison term, during which he had a vision of Maria picking and giving him flowers as a token of forgiveness. He became a changed man and was released 3 years early; he asked pardon of her mother and was present at Maria’s canonization. Feast-day: July 6; patron of Catholic youth, teens and girls.

St. Mark, Evangelist (First century) Friend of St. Peter (who calls him “his son”), first mentioned when Peter escapes prison and goes to the home of Mark’s mother (Acts 12:12). He went with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey; Paul refused his company for the 2nd over a misunderstandings later reconciled. Peter, the churches at Jerusalem & Antioch, were sources for his gospel, composed 65-70AD. While Bishop of Alexandria, he suffered death as a martyr. Feast-day: April 25; patron of Egypt, Venice (buried there), and notaries.

St. Martha (First century) Close friend of Jesus; He often visited her home (shared with Lazarus and Mary, her sister and brother) in Bethany. She busied herself with hospitality, pointing out that Mary should help. She sent for Jesus when Lazarus was ill, even though His coming so near Jerusalem would have been risky, given death threats and plots known to be against Him. She made a straightforward profession of faith before she saw Lazarus resuscitated. Feast-day: July 29; patron of housewives, waiters and waitresses.

St. Martin de Porres (1579-1639) Son of unmarried, mixed-race parents: raised poor, called a half-breed, he was never bitter. To support himself, he learned to cut hair, care for wounds & administer medicine. He joined the Dominicans as a lay helper and 9 years later took religious vows. He spent nights at prayer and each day cared for the sick and poor, regardless of color, race, or status. Feast-day: November 3; patron of hairdressers, race relations and social justice.

St. Nicholas (Fourth century) That he was Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor is the only certain fact known of him. The best known legend about him concerns charity toward a poor man unable to provide dowries for 3 marriageable daughters; without a dowry, a girl could be forced into prostitution. At 3 separate times, Nicholas tossed bags of gold coins through the man's window to provide dowries, making for a custom of gift-giving on his feast day. By a twist of the tongue, St. Nicholas became Santa Claus. Feast-day: December 6; patron of bakers, brewers, brides, children, Greece, grooms, merchants, pawnbrokers, Russia, travelers.

St. Patrick (415-493) Born a Roman citizen in Britain to a nominally Christian family, at age 16 he was stolen by Irish raiders and sold into slavery as a shepherd; captivity was his conversion experience as he learned to pray fervently and believe mightily. Escaping after 6 years, he was trained to be a priest and, despite reservations about his intellectual ability, was sent to Ireland as a missionary. A man of action and strong conviction, he spread the faith among the pagans and organized the church in Ireland so well that the rest of Europe was Christianized by those he had trained. Feast-day: March 17; patron of engineers, Ireland and Nigeria.

St. Paul (d. 64AD) A former Pharisee and Mosaic lawyer, he mystically encountered Jesus and was blinded on the road to Damascus where he had intended to persecute Christians. Healed, converted and baptized by Ananias, he preached as a traveling missionary, establishing many local churches during 3 missionary journeys; his epistle letters make evident his preaching and teaching skills. Beheaded outside the walls of Rome (site marked by the Basilica that bears his name), he is, with Peter, a pillar of our faith. Feast-days: January 25 (Conversion), June 29 (with Peter); patron of the internet.

St. Peter (d. 64AD) A commercial fisherman called by Jesus as one of his earliest disciples. A man prone to doubts, misunderstandings, weakness, denial and other unflattering failures, he was still chosen by Jesus to be the "rock" on which the faith of the Church would be built. By tradition, our first Pope, a martyr in Rome during the persecution of Emperor Nero, crucified upside down on Vatican hill where now stands the great Basilica that bears his name and holds his remains. Feast-days: February 22 (Chair of Peter) and June 29 (with Paul).

St. Philomena (First century) A 12-13 year old girl whose burial site was discovered in 1802 in a catacomb; the inscription, "Peace be with you, Philomena" and symbols on her tomb indicated she was a martyr. Her intercession was made popular by John Vianney; invoked as the patron of babies, children, youth and hopeless, impossible cases, some may recall the shrine to her at Briggsville, WI. Mid-twentieth century investigations raised doubts about her story and her cult was suppressed in 1961 by then, now St. Pope John XXIII.

St. Pope Pius X (1835-1914) One of the 20th century's greatest popes, he encouraged frequent reception of Holy Communion and lowered the age for First Communion by children to 7. He encouraged Catholics to become more involved in politics to protect the rights of the church and religion from government interference. A humble man, he was embarrassed by the pomp surrounding the papacy. He wrote no encyclicals but tried to prevent WWI; he died 2 weeks after the war broke out, feeling that he had failed. Feast-day: August 21.

St. Rita of Cascia (1381-1457) Wanting to become a nun, she was pressured into marriage at an early age to a cruel man who treated her awfully. After 18 years, her husband was killed in a brawl; then both her sons died. Eventually she joined the Augustinian nuns; very prayerful, she developed wounds on her forehead that people associated with Jesus' Crown of Thorns. She cared for the sick, counseled many widows and those in troubled marriages. Feast-day: May 22; patron of difficult marriages, impossible causes, infertility and parenthood.

St. Suzanna (Fourth century) By legend, a beautiful, scholarly daughter of a priest and niece to Pope St. Casius, she refused an arranged marriage to the Emperor's son-in-law as she wished to remain a virgin, bride only to Christ. Two military officers sent to dissuade her of stubbornness were instead converted to Christianity by her word and example. An angry Emperor killed the officers, had Suzanna beheaded, and then had her father killed. Feast-day: August 11.

St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897) This Carmelite nun, called "the Little Flower," lived her life in cloistered obscurity but developed a deep spirituality of simple prayer & little goods deeds that still influences Catholic spirituality, described in her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*. In light of her holiness and teaching, she was recognized as a Doctor of the Church (only third woman so honored) in 1997 by now Pope Saint John Paul II. Her parents, Louis and Zelig Martin, were beatified in 2008. Feast-day: October 1; patron of florists, missionaries and pilots.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) Given at age 5 to a Benedictine monastery in hopes he would choose that way of life, by age 18 he had other ideas and joined the Dominicans. Intrigued by the wisdom of his professor, Albert the Great, and the philosophy of Aristotle, from these two he developed a presentation of Christian theology unmatched for comprehensiveness. He was a great professor and ardent defender of the faith. He never finished his work, called *Summa Theologica*, because, while celebrating Mass, he realized that what he held before his sight and in his hands at the altar far surpassed whatever he could ever write. He died 3 months later. Feast-day: January 28; patron of Catholic schools, colleges, schools and students.

Second & Third Class Relics Associated with the Life of Our Savior and the Blessed Mother

Touched to the Lord's Holy Garment: 1933 – A small piece of cloth touched to the seamless garment (coat) of Our Lord kept in the Cathedral of Trier, Germany. That coat might be the very one touched by the woman who thought -“If I just touch his clothing, I shall get well.’ Immediately her flow of blood stopped. Conscious that healing power had gone out of him, Jesus turned and asked the crowd; ‘Who touched my clothing?’” (Mark 5:28-30).

Veil of the Blessed Virgin Mary (First century) This cloth has been in the Cathedral of Chartres for over a thousand years and scientific examinations have reinforced its veneration as having belonged to the Mother of God. In 1793, during the French Revolution, when churches were profaned, the relic was torn and smaller divisions were given to many who were present; it is assumed that this piece came from that mutilation. Feast-day: August 15.

Definitions: When a relic is from part of the saint's body, it is called a **first-class relic**, something touched or used by the saint is called a **second-class relic**, and something touched to a first or a second class relic is called a **third class relic**.

How is a relic known to be authentic?

Relics that have been distributed by lawful church authority come with documents that attest to their authenticity. About 88% of these relics have their canonical papers of authentication; the several that do not are reliably known once to have had such but actual papers were lost.

Veneration of Relics

Catholics do not pray to saints, nor do we worship relics, as God alone is rightly and truly the only worthy subject of our worship & our praise. So what role do saints and relics have in the context of a Christian life for a devout Catholic?

Many people honor loved ones by keeping family pictures around the house, whether of the living or faithfully departed. It is not uncommon for family members to keep and even use a cherished item that once belonged to a deceased loved one – grandma’s jewelry or rosary, a family Bible, baptismal garment, handed on from one generation to the next. Such items are treated with honor and reverence, treasured, kept in safe packaging or a special place as they help recall a person’s life and retain memories of what they were all about. We honor human remains of loved ones. My mother saved a clipping from my first haircut! Monuments are erected to brave, famous men and women; grave markers memorialize our final resting place.

Catholics see the saints gone before us as members of our family, deserving of honor for their heroic lives of holiness. We honor their names, their examples, their stories and their bodies after death as these, remembered and placed before us, urge us forward on our faith journey. By honoring their memories, bodies, and belongings, we give thanks to God for the witness of their love for God and zeal to live of true, Christian life. Relics are physical, tangible, concrete reminders that heaven is obtainable for us, as long as we recognize what made a saint holy & endeavor to apply those qualities to our lives. As we behold these relics, we recall the holy lives of saints and pray for the grace to achieve what they did – eternity with God in heaven!